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[MY LADY MADCAP.]

A BURIED SIN; OR, HAUNTED LIVES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Kate Branksome's Fool," &c., &c.

CHAPTER III.

MY LORD'S COUNSELLORS.

And one there was among us, ever moved
Among us in white armour, Galahad.
"God make thee good as thou art beautiful,"
Said Arthur when he dubb'd him knight.

Of all friendships commend us to that of the dear old college days, when we rode each other's horses, drank each other's wines, abetted each other's misdoings, and lived like brothers.

Of all cosy dinners of two commend us to those served in quaint rooms of our university towns, rooms disorderly and bookstrewn, with the old monastic odour about them. Dinners ordered by a grave college don, epicure and bon vivant; eaten whilst gay laughter, merry shouts, the chorus of a drinking song, float across the quadrangle; and we and that dear old boy in the capacious waistcoat pause with uplifted glasses to listen and grow young again.

Of all wines commend us to those our host, acting as his own butler, will produce from great dusty bins in huge, cool vaulted cellars, handing the cobwebbed bottles with tender

care, and decanting them as though the precious golden drops were his life blood.

So they are, the blood of a richer, fuller life than that of the present; a life of mad escapades, of wild, foolish freaks, of fierce town-and-gown riots, of hairbreadth 'scapes from prowling proctors. How the youngsters would stare if they could hear us talk!

How the subtle, delicate aroma of the wine quickens our recollections! Do you remember Tom Jervis, who thought himself insulted at one "wine," and proposed a duel with a bundle of rockets he had smuggled into his room? Poor Tom! he was killed at Balaclava. Goynes Jeffries! What, the man who was rusticated for playing the maddest pranks every night for a fortnight, finishing by the adulteration of Professor Brown's coffee? The little man drank ten cups, you know, every night, and the stuff put in them made him so unwontedly agile he danced a hornpipe opposite old Sextus's door, to what he called panel accompaniment, thumping it, that is, with a thick stick. You remember old Sextus? When he came out, looking Jove's thunderbolts, the professor said he had discovered the secret of perpetual motion. Goynes Jeffries! Well, well, and you say he is the celebrated Judge Jeffries now. Wonders never cease. There is little Spiffkins, who could not say "Boh" to a goose; Miss Mary we called him. Now he is the finest pleader in a criminal case on circuit. And that rabid Protestant, Dolly Stanhope, has gone over to Rome, and Slowcome Jester, of King's, the fool par excellence, is a bishop.

With some such talk as this the earl and his friend chat over their wine. In the days of which they speak Abercrombie and he were in-

separable, so much so they went by the sobriquets of Mind and Matter. It was the truest bond of union, that of opposites; their dissimilarity was the firmest bond of friendship. Many a mad orgie they assisted at, and came away scatheless, either by reason of the intellectual force of the one, or the brute strength of the other. "You supply biceps, old man. I will find brains." That was their simple contract, and it worked to admiration.

The earl wants his old comrade to find brains now.

"The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children," he cries, bitterly. "You remember what I was thirty years ago; what I should have been without you to keep me in order. Multiply the headstrong impulsiveness, the love of mischief, the reckless disregard of consequences by ten, and you have a pretty correct picture of Ferrars.

"Hal," says the other, and the old boyish diminutive falls soothingly upon the earl's ears, "can you not work upon the lad's affection?"

A twinge of pain contracts my lord's rugged features.

"Heaven knows whether the boy has any filial affection left. When he was young I neglected and" (the speaker's voice sinks very low) "almost hated him for his mother's sake, do you understand? When he grew older, and I saw what a wild young cub he was, I thwarted him always as far as lay in my power, under the impression it was necessary discipline. And now all my influence for good or bad is gone."

"Are you not tired of a constant succession of tutors?"

"Tired enough, but what can I do? He is not fit for college; the boy is densely ignorant.

If it were not so, I dare not send him. We know what the life is, you and I. If thirty years have improved it in some respects, they have rendered it in others a fitter training-school for a plunger's career. A broken reputation, a wasted fortune, that is all college would prepare him for at present."

"Then you still hope a resident tutor might accomplish a work of reformation?"

"Drowning men catch at straws; the resident tutor is my straw. The difficulty is to find the right Mentor for so truculent a Ulysses."

"Shall I find him?" asks Doctor Abercrombie, quietly, but with a confident intonation which causes the earl to look up eagerly.

"The hope you might do so brought me here."

"Fill your glass," rejoins the other. "I will tell you a story."

The last rays of the setting sun steal through the little triangular panes of the encaustic, and make a faint glory amongst the decanters. The earl leans back in his chair, composing himself to listen. The reverend doctor plays idly with a little heap of walnut shells, and speaks absently, as though he were thinking aloud.

"Did you ever read Tennyson's 'Holy Grail'?" Did you picture to yourself the face of the purest of all Arthur's knights, of him who sat in Merlin's mystic chair, 'the siege-perilous,' and saw first the vision in quest of which they all wandered?"

"Four years ago I first noticed in hall a lad of whom my first thought was that he might sit to a painter for Sir Galahad."

"His face was a perfect oval, almost womanish in its clearness of complexion and delicacy of colouring, in the perfect arch of the eyebrows and the whiteness of the teeth, but he was considerably above the middle height and his slight, symmetrical figure was stronger than it looked."

"It was the expression that arrested my attention. I never saw so good a one before. I never saw so clear an impress of earnest, noble purpose, of loyal gentleman and chivalric knight, sans peur et sans reproche."

"Sir Galahad I dubbed him on the spot. When I came to inquire his name and family I found the former was Mostyn Howard and the latter a mystery."

"There are Howards everywhere, you know—north, south, east and west. No one knew where the lad spent his vacations, on that subject and all bearing upon his connections he maintained an impenetrable reserve."

"I once heard a half-tipsy gentleman come down banter him upon this silence, only a few words somewhat coarsely strung together, and I saw the look with which he returned the gibe. I never thought the boy's beauty effeminate after that. There was such a blaze of furious repressed passion in the eyes the speaker stopped short and faltered an apology."

"Mostyn Howard made but few friends. He worked very hard for one thing, always as though it were against time, and he could waste none in cultivating acquaintances."

"He seemed to have plenty of money and spent it lavishly upon the amusements he allowed himself."

"There was rather a contemptuous feeling about him at first, traceable to his womanish appearance and close application. One big fellow nicknamed him 'the sucking cherub.' Three months later that man was his warmest admirer."

"Judging from results the 'sucking cherub' must have thrown into everything to which he had set his hand from extreme youth the same determined energy which distinguished him now."

"He proved a capital cricketer, the best bowler of his college and one of the most brilliant bats. The boating men got hold of him one evening after they had seen the style in which he sculled, felt his biceps, and wanted him to train for the university race, but he declined. As for courage and pluck I saw him one night mixed up in a 'big row' with the 'cads,' and they went down like ninepins. He fought like Achilles."

"Well, for two years I kept an eye on the lad

with a kind of paternal interest. Sometimes he would spend a quiet evening with me. I did not ask him often, for I thought he might find the society of such an old fogie dull."

"Hal, I can assure you he put me to the blush more than once. I have read carefully and assiduously, I have a scholar's reputation, but the youngster's erudition sometimes took my breath away. He had not studied systematically, he must have skimmed very lightly, often, yet he seemed to have carried away more than mere surface knowledge, to have mastered the subject in fact."

"It was marvellous; but the secret lay I imagine in the quiet intensity with which he applied himself to everything. I never remember being so thoroughly impressed by any man's brain power as by him. I predicted great things, for I saw he aimed high. I regarded his success as certain when he went away for the last 'long,' prior to the 'exams.'"

"When he returned there was a change in his face. It was not Sir Galahad's now, it was Lancelot's, all marred and worn by some great passion or some great sin. I could not connect the latter thought with my boy knight; you will smile when I tell you I found a more romantic solution. I believe still that he met his fate in that long vacation, and was 'crossed in love,' as the old women call it."

"Be that as it may, he worked fitfully, irregularly. The old knack of concentration seemed lost. He went up for the 'exams' and took honours, but lay down on the list. It was a kind of failure—for him."

"His income ceased, he told me, with the payment of his university expenses. He is in London now, earning a bare subsistence, I suppose, by literary work. I recognise his style occasionally in the leaders of one or two of the daily papers. He is worthy a better fate; some day, please God, he will make his mark in the world, I am sure."

"Hal, if you can induce Mostyn Howard to leave London and become your son's tutor it will be the first step towards reformation. Once interest him in the work and I have faith he will carry it through if any man can."

Doctor Abercrombie's tale is ended. The earl reaches across the table and shakes hands with such a mighty squeeze the little man winces painfully.

"Dear old friend, you give me new hope. Where does this wonderful protégé of yours live? I will hunt him up to-morrow."

"Surely, you mean to give me your company for a day or two?"

"Impossible. I am always uneasy away from Preston Castle, haunted by the idea Ferrars may conceive the brilliant notion some day of setting it on fire. I should like to leave by an early train in the morning to catch St. John Darrell at his late breakfast."

The doctor laughs.

"I see. It is a case of Ahithophel and Hushai the Archite."

"Eh?"

"You think 'two heads are better than one,' and wish to confer with Darrell."

The earl colours a little.

"I certainly started with the intention of consulting you both," he says.

"Far be it from me to balk your intention; it will be by far the more satisfactory course. I will write a note acquainting Mostyn Howard with the position, you can drop it into the nearest letter-box as soon as you leave St. John, if his advice agree with mine, as doubtless it will. The note will reach Mostyn in an hour or two, and you can call upon him in the evening, so no time will be lost if you are really anxious to return home."

So the subject drops, and the earl and his friend fall into disjointed talk of pleasant, far-off times as the mists of memory clear and reveal them. The rare old "comet" port warms their sluggish blood. They crack the ancient jokes, fight the old fights, disinter from oblivion forgotten escapades. The two gray-headed men are boys again, boys—and brothers.

Late into the night their tireless tongues wag merrily as ever, till they discover with a start

how long past midnight it is, and so ascend the worn-eaten stairs to their respective rooms.

But in the morning they awake, fresh and hopeful, as though so many youthful reminiscences had given a fresh lease of life. They breakfast together, they walk arm-in-arm to the station, brothers still, they look fondly and lingeringly at each other's wrinkled faces as the train steams slowly out. Ah! there are no friendships like that chosen out of the dear old college days.

It is half-past one when my lord of Malbrecckthane presents himself at his kinsman's rooms. A table, glittering with silver, covered with costly dishes, spread with all the delicacies that may tempt a faded appetite, is laid for one. Through the thin walls comes a sound as of the splashing and dashing of falling water. St. John's voice shouts that he is in his shower-bath (used in preference to any other both summer and winter from sheer laziness) and will be with the earl in a few minutes. Then it relapses into its usual languid monotone, requesting Pepito (his valet) to place a fork and a plate for the unexpected visitor.

"Good morning, Malbrecckthane. Have some breakfast."

"Good afternoon," retorts the other. "I have no objection to a little lunch."

"Comme vous voulez, monsieur. A rose by any other name would smell as sweet."

"If you arose five hours earlier, for example. In that case you might call the first meal of the day by its proper name."

"An'yon love me make no puns, Malbrecckthane. I object to an inquest being held in my rooms."

"Eh?"

"I should not like to see twelve grocers, and bakers, and candlestick-makers sitting on the body of a defunct relative, to return a verdict of 'Death from unduly stimulating the imaginative powers.' What brings you to town?"

"To ask your advice in the first instance."

"My advice! Malbrecckthane, I am an ingenuous youth of only thirty summers. Play not upon the credulity of such a one."

"I am in serious earnest."

"Nay, then, let me be serious also. There are two subjects of paramount importance in the ages of mankind—money and love. I flatter myself you have come to the right person for pecuniary counsel. He who has spent two fortunes, and has nearly run through the third, is a brilliant financial genius of course."

"It is not a question of money."

"Tant mieux. I am still more au fait upon the tender passion. A man who has broken his own heart regularly every year for the last decade and a half, and the hearts of about a hundred fair damsels within the same period (if the owners may be believed), should be able to advise a lad of your age. You are quite a lad still, you know, in the eyes of matchmaking mammas and marriageable daughters. The title makes you look twenty years younger at least, and every thousand of income knocks a year off your age by their calculations. Who is to be Countess of Malbrecckthane?"

"No one, until Ferrars marries."

"Which the saints forbid till the young lunatic comes to his senses. Neither love nor money then incites you to consult such a Solomon as myself. I will guess once more. It is ambition. Do you want to be ambassador to the Court of China? Chancellor of the Exchequer? First Lord of the Admiralty? Seeing that your adviser has persistently declined every chance of distinction, social and political, all his life, your choice of him is hardly a happy one."

With the last sentence a slight change comes over the speaker's manner—a kind of chafed earnestness. The earl does not note it. He hears only the careless words and the mocking intonation. His ear is not fine enough to detect the address which underlies the carelessness and mockery. He sees only the broad white brow, the dark, reposeful face, the languid eyes, in the depths of which lurks indolent, sarcastic amusement, and he feels irritated with the chosen confidant, whose care nothing air is so uninviting.

"For Heaven's sake, Darrell, get rid of that look of everlasting boredom. Here am I at my wit's end, worried out of my life, and you sneer, sneer, sneer at everything, as though there were not an evil under the sun worth exciting one's self about."

St. John Darrell laughs gently.
"I have never yet found one. But I am not so unsympathetic as I seem, old friend. What is your difficulty?"

Thus interrogated, the earl begins the history of his troubles, describes his interview with Abercrombie, and reproduces, in an oddly distorted fashion, that learned doctor's description of Mostyn Howard.

St. John Darrell listens with grave attention. Occasionally the ghost of a smile flickers under his drooping moustache as my lord of Malbreckthane makes a sad jumble of historic names and poetical associations, but the supercilious, cynical, ennuyé expression which habitually mars his face has vanished in answer to his kinsman's appeal.

"So, if we can secure this Sir Gad-about, as Abercrombie calls him, Ferrars stands a fair chance of finding his match," concludes the earl. "What do you think?"

"If Mostyn Howard be what Abercrombie pictures him—a manly fellow, well up in all sports, a good 'all-round' man, only a few years Ferrars's senior, and yet his superior in patience, courage, and dogged determination—the young cub may probably be licked into shape."

"Bravo!" cries the earl. "I knew you must see it in that light, but thought it better to take no decisive step until I was quite sure of your opinion. Now I will post Abercrombie's letter of introduction, and towards evening I can put in an appearance myself."

"Stop," says Darrell, as his companion rises from his seat and commences to hunt for hat and gloves. "Pepito will post the letter, but have you counted the cost of installing this rare avis, this admirable Crichton, this handsome young tutor at Freston Castle?"

"I do not care what may be the cost. I shall offer him five hundred a year."

"Do not be dense, Malbreckthane. It will not be a matter of pounds, shillings, and pence, but of broken hearts—possibly of stolen meetings and clandestine vows."

"Eh?" the earl looks supremely mystified.

"If this young fellow has sufficient pluck, dash, energy, and natural force of character to break in the brother, he will probably win the sister's heart during the process. To throw a lad—he is hardly more—of brilliant parts into the constant society of a raw schoolgirl, high-spirited and beautiful, is an act of folly that invites such a catastrophe."

My lord drops into a lounging chair and laughs long and heartily.

"Ha, ha, ha! 'Saul among the prophets.' Darrell turned seer and romancer! By Jove, if you could only have seen the little puss as she appeared an hour before I left Freston Castle your romantic notions would die an untimely death. She had put on a short frock and was racing Ferrars for a box of chocolate creams. He gave her ten yards in a hundred, and she beat him. Love! The child is a perfect baby still. I almost wish she would fall in love, if only to take away some of her wildness and make a woman of her."

All his companion's listlessness of manner has returned.

"I have cautioned you," he says, languidly, striking a hand-bell. "Pepito!"

"Si, signor."

"Post this letter at once."

"Si, signor."

"The Rubicon is passed," says St. John Darrell, meditatively.

"Eh?"

"How shall we amuse ourselves until this evening? Are you quite disengaged? What do you say to a turn in the Row? Really, Malbreckthane, an eligible young fellow of your age ought not to bury himself in his den at Freston. Come and stare at the belle of the season, man. She is every whit as much in the market as

those prize heifers you bought at the Bath and West of England Show."

CHAPTER IV.

AN INTERVIEW AND A TOAST.

Not to be
A bookworm eaten up with pedantry.
But just a gentleman.

"Is Mr. Howard at home?"

"Yes, sir."

"Be good enough to take this card to him and ask if he will see me for a few minutes."

The woman returns, dropping a succession of little reverential courtesies, and evidently seriously flurried by the presence of a real live nobleman.

She conducts him up two flights of stairs, pausing now and again to proffer servile apologies for taking the lead, and ushers him into a large and comfortably-furnished room. There is a table in the centre covered with sheets of manuscript, a pile of foolscap, and books of reference. A young man rises from it and lays down his pen.

"Mr. Howard, I presume?" says the earl, bowing.

"I am Mostyn Howard, my lord. May I wheel this chair forward for you? Not that one"—as the earl is about to appropriate a slight structure within reach—"it is a delusion and a snare, and has a knack of depositing my visitors on the ground."

"I fear this visit is an intrusion," hesitates the earl, glancing at the table. "If you will be less busy—"

"By no means. I am generally hard at work. An old English proverb illustrates my unfortunate position in a not very refined manner. 'Needs must when the devil drives.' You passed his Satanic Majesty in the passage, I believe."

"Eh?"
"The printer's boy, waiting for copy. To what do I owe the honour of a call, my lord?"

"I hoped Doctor Abercrombie's letter, which I posted earlier in the day, would open the subject. Has it miscarried?"

Mostyn Howard glances round the apartment.

"A letter was certainly brought an hour or two ago, but I was deep in thought, and put it down without breaking the seal. Oh, it is here, on the mantelpiece."

"If you will kindly acquaint yourself with its contents," suggests the earl. "I could wish for no better introduction."

Mostyn Howard hesitates, slightly embarrassed.

"My lord, pardon me for asking a question."

"My dear sir, I will answer forty with pleasure."

Mostyn laughs.

"Will our interview be a lengthy one?"

"It will take half an hour, possibly longer."

"Is your lordship's time so precious that twenty minutes' delay will seriously inconvenience you?"

"Certainly not."

"Then may I beg the favour of that delay, for reasons I will explain afterwards? Here are some daily papers and two or three magazines. I will not trespass upon your patience longer than the stipulated time."

Mostyn Howard returns to his manuscript, and my lord of Malbreckthane studies, ostensibly, a newspaper, in reality the unconscious, thoughtful countenance bent above the blank foolscap.

A powerful face, he decides. One of mingled sweetness and strength; one that impresses the observer with a sense of settled and almost stern gravity, oddly at variance with its youthfulness. The strange contrast forces itself even upon so unpractised a physiognomist as the earl, and he wonders.

The twenty minutes draw to a close. The writer's pen travels quickly, incessantly, and concludes with a flourish. He counts the sheets, folds them, thrusts them into an envelope, and

turns to his visitor, who is watching proceedings with eyes observant and amused.

"I must leave you for one minute, my lord. Pray pardon me."

The earl bows contentedly. Quick steps descend the stairs and return as rapidly.

"I owe you an explanation."

"By no means. I am unhappy in not dropping upon your moments of leisure."

"They are like angels' visits—few and far between. The work for which I had to neglect you is a leader which will appear in one of to-morrow's papers. It should have been sent in an hour ago, but I was unexpectedly delayed hunting up some dates."

"Please do not say another word about it or you will make me feel quite a culprit for intruding at all," cries the earl. "Let me commend Abercrombie's letter to your attention."

So Mostyn Howard peruses the note, and the earl watches his face anxiously, but it gives no sign. A keener student of human nature might infer from the thoughtful, unvarying expression, masking completely its wearer's thoughts, a constant habit of guarded repression.

The note is long, and the reader lingers over it, going through some sentences twice. Then he folds the letter and replaces it in the envelope.

"Well?" says the earl.

"I cannot help you, my lord."

"But you can help me," cries Lord Malbreckthane, excitedly. "Do not make up your mind in that composed way before we have even discussed the matter."

"I fear discussion will not render it less hopeless."

"Do you apply the adjective to my son's reformation?"

"No. I would not abandon hope of so desirable a result."

"I am almost in despair," rejoins the earl, sadly. "You are my last resource. Will you not help me?"

"I cannot."

"A polite way of saying you will not. At all events, hear my proposition. I will pay five hundred pounds per annum to your bankers so long as you shall remain at Freston Castle as my son's tutor."

"It is a munificent offer, my lord, about double my present earnings, but money will not tempt me."

The earl groans.

"Will you take me sufficiently into confidence to tell all your objections?"

Mostyn Howard mused a little.

"You may deem them very ungracious, probably."

"Nevertheless, I would like to know what they are."

"Then let us assume that I accept your offer. In the first place, I sacrifice independence."

"A delusion. You will be in all respects your own master. Your movements will be perfectly unquestioned. You will be received and treated as a member of my family, and your orders will be respected by my servants as though they were my own."

"It is a position of great responsibility."

"Granted. But the responsibility is to yourself, not to me or any other person. If you fail, it is what dozens have done before; if you succeed, you earn my life-long gratitude."

"I may be subjected to most objectionable personal indignities from Lord Ferrars."

"True; but you meet him on equal terms. You have pluck, brains, strength, and my moral support under all circumstances."

"Even if I be obliged to use violent and unprecedented means to obtain supremacy?"

"Most assuredly. I bind myself to question no expedient, however extreme."

"My lord," exclaims Howard, "your generosity shames me into confidence, although not compliance. May I tell you a little of my history, and of my aspirations?"

"If you will."

"I am an orphan. My father was a contemptible scoundrel to whom I owe nothing save existence. My mother died when I was eleven years old. She bequeathed a small sum

in Consols—which came originally from her father, the savings, I believe, from his business as a woollen draper—to be expended in giving me the education of a gentleman. That sum was exhausted when I left college, save about one hundred and fifty pounds, which I preserve for any emergency.

"I distinguished myself less at college than I had hoped to do, owing to a cause into which I need not enter. Want of capital barred all the professions save that of literature. I came to London with scanty introductions. It was up-hill work at first. Now I am making headway. I write for magazines and for the papers, and my articles sell. I begin to know a few literary men who have climbed high upon that ladder at the bottom rounds of which I am stumbling.

"In intervals of necessary work I am engaged on an historical novel. It progresses very slowly, for I hope to make a name by it, and I write most carefully. Can you understand how acceptance of your proposal would interfere with my ambition? I should lose the connection, gained so laboriously, with publishers and proprietors. I should be obliged to relinquish dearly-earned literary intimacies and friendships. Failing in my new aim I must begin again at the very foot of the ladder as I did before.

"Succeeding I must conscientiously endeavour to earn a liberal salary by devoting all my time and all my thoughts to the end required. In common fairness the novel must be laid aside, and I am not prepared to sacrifice ambition to either ease or lucre."

"Nor need you," rejoins the earl. "Are you willing to be convinced that the three things are compatible?"

"Who is not?"

Lord Malbreckthane leans forward in his eagerness. The young man's rejection of his offers makes him the more desirous to secure his services.

"What I hope from your installation as Ferrars's tutor is not the driving so much Latin and Greek per day into his empty cranium, but a moral influence that will save him from becoming an accomplished blackguard, and make him in time, I trust, as true a gentleman as yourself, Mr. Howard, be your ancestors woollen-drappers or Plantagenets. It seems to me that if he prove you his superior in those muscular exercises he rates so highly, respect for personal prowess will induce deference to opinion and example in other matters. In time he might even be persuaded to read with you.

"Meanwhile the tutorship will be almost a sinecure. Its requirements are comprised in presenting yourself at meals and in taking an interest in such of Ferrars's pastimes as you can share. Many hours daily might be devoted to literary work. My library, one of the best in England, is at your disposal. Personal expenditure will hardly be more than one fifth of income, so that if you hold this appointment only one year you will save sufficient to afford a long breathing-time. Should Ferrars's insults drive you away in less time my purse and my influence will be at your service, and you may rest assured no serious injury will have befallen your prospects."

"My lord," says Mostyn Howard, "you overpower me. I—I—"

"Accept, I hope," interposes the earl, triumphantly. "Will you dine with me at my club in an hour from now? Will you come back with me to-morrow?"

"Neither, thanks. I have work that must be done. I can hardly free myself from all engagements in less than a month."

"Nonsense. I shall fret myself into a fever in that time. Your rooms shall be ready in a week, and I shall look for a letter every post after that instructing me to send a carriage to the station. It shall not be my fault," says the earl, warmly, extending his hand, "if we are not friends."

"Nor mine, indeed. I will join you as early as possible."

"Then good bye for a week."

"Good bye. Let me pilot you down the stairs. There are often traps laid for the unwary in the shape of brushes and pails."

With another vigorous hand-shaking the two men separate. Lord Malbreckthane hails a passing cab, and is driven to his club, feeling gay and hopeful. Mostyn Howard returns to his room, but, busy as he professes to be, he throws himself into an easy chair and thinks awhile.

"Right or wrong," he murmurs, at length, "the event must prove. I was growing very weary of this monotonous existence. I shall work the better perhaps with the scent of new-made hay floating through the window and the sight of green fields to soothe my eyes when I lift them."

It is a bright, sunshiny afternoon when the earl returns to Freston Castle, and the family are at luncheon. Mrs. Carew greets him with a cold bow; she feels aggrieved at not having been taken into confidence as to the object of his journey. Blanche Carew gives him a smile that is like sunshine itself, and that bespeaks a perfect understanding between them. Lord Ferrars nods sulkily; Lady Clare jumps up, and bestows an affectionate hug which renders a change of linen imperatively necessary, so seriously do starched cravat and collar suffer.

"Confess!" she cries, "confess! Where have you been? What have you done? Why did you run away without telling us?"

"May I not have a morsel to eat before I answer all those breathless questions?"

"Certainly not. You might refuse, whereas now hunger will compel you to speak. Harris!"

"My lady."

"You are not to give my father anything he asks without my permission. Now, my lord, confess!"

He smiles down on the merry upturned face. With all her faults, this loving, petulant, intractable girl is very dear to him.

"Tyrant! Put your questions one by one."

"Why did you run away without telling us?"

"Because an unruly daughter might have insisted on accompanying me. Discretion is the better part of valour."

"Where have you been?"

"To Oxford, and to London."

"What have you done?"

"Engaged another tutor for Ferrars."

"More sport!" exclaims that young gentleman. "Clare, I will bet ten to one in boxes of chocolate creams, I drive him away in a month."

"I shall be careful how I bet with you; the last time you swindled me. Papa, is the new tutor very aged?"

"No," says Lord Malbreckthane, smiling.

"Is he a gentleman?"

"By education and breeding, yes. By birth no. His grandfather was a woollen-draper."

Lady Clare's dainty head is raised a little disdainfully.

"Does this—this person—look at all like the keeper in a lunatic asylum?"

"I never went over a lunatic asylum."

"You know very well what I mean, my lord. Is he strong, muscular, and all that?"

"Tolerably so, I think."

"Then I take your bet, Ferrars."

"The month to begin from the day of arrival?"

"Of course."

"Hurrah! you will lose again, Clare."

"It is to be hoped," says Mrs. Carew, stiffly, "the disgraceful insults which drove the last tutor away will not be repeated."

"It is to be hoped," mimics Lord Ferrars, with curiously correct imitation of the lady's measured and frigid intonation, "that this gentleman's departure will not be accelerated by matrimonial designs on the part of a certain widow who shall be nameless."

Mrs. Carew looks deeply horrified.

"Surely, Ferrars, you cannot intend that abominable insinuation for me."

"Surely," he continues, "the worst spoke in the wheel always creaks first. Surely she whom the caps fits must wear it."

"Ferrars," cries his father, angrily, "your

rudeness is unpardonable. A lady should be safe from such attacks. You astonish me."

"One good turn deserves another, my lord. I have often wondered at your proceedings. Mine ought by this time to have ceased to surprise you."

"They ought, indeed," asserts Lord Malbreckthane, sadly.

"Harris!" shouts his son, "a tumbler of sherry, and fill it to the brim."

"A glass, my lord?"

"A tumbler, idiot. I am about to propose a toast. Fair ladies—my lord of Malbreckthane—I am about to give you a toast, in the good old-fashioned way. "Confusion to the new tutor."

He swallows half the wine at a draught as he speaks, and looks round the tables. There is a dead silence.

"I pledge myself," he continues, "to drive him away in a month. To this task I will devote all my energies, woe to him who interferes."

Mrs. Carew raises her hands in mute despair.

"Will no one drink my toast? Clare, dear little sis, we have pulled through many lawless freaks together. The old life is sweet and pleasant to us both, is it not? What have we to do with musty old tutors, musty old books, rubbish written ages ago? Come, join me, dear. Raise the glass to your pretty lips, and join me. Confusion to the new tutor."

"Confusion to the new tutor," repeats Lady Clare, softly.

(To be Continued.)

SCIENCE.

SAFETY SHELLS.—We understand that a successful trial has taken place, solving a problem which has for a long time occupied the attention of specialists, namely, the use of dynamite as employed for bursting charges and shells. A howdah and an 8-pounder have been employed to test the invention. The distinctive property of the missile is that it is non-explosive in transit, and becomes explosive only by a simple process upon loading the gun. The inventors claim to be able to apply their principle to nitro-glycerine or any other explosive. We hear that this invention has been submitted to the War Office authorities, but no encouragement having been shown to the inventors, it is very probable that this important discovery will be appropriated by a foreign government which has already made advances for the purchase of the invention. It is to be regretted that this invention of Englishmen should not have had a fair trial from the ordnance officials of their own country.

DEVELOPMENT OF CURRENTS IN SILENIUM.—A new property of selenium has been brought to the notice of the Paris Academy by M. Blandiot. He attaches to one pole of a capillary electrometer, by means of a platinum wire, a piece of annealed selenium; to the other pole a platinum plate. With an insulating handle he then brings the selenium in contact with the platinum plate. The electrometer remains at zero, but on rubbing the one metal on the other a strong deflection is obtained, sometimes equal to that from a sulphate of copper element. Now M. Becquerel got currents in a galvanometer by rubbing two metal plates together, but the currents were in the same direction as when the surface of friction was heated, indicating that the friction acted by heat. In the present case it is the reverse, the friction having a direct action and giving currents opposite to those got by heating. That is, the current goes from the unrubbed to the rubbed part of the selenium. It is further curious that the deflection produced by rubbing persists after ceasing to rub. The selenium having allowed the high-tension electricity due to friction to pass, opposes a resistance too great for the weak polarisation of the mercury in the electrometer.



[WEAVING THE WEB.]

A SPRIG OF MISTLETOE: A CHRISTMAS STORY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"A Pretty Angler," "A Mysterious Husband,"
"A Little Love Chat," "Won Without
Weeping," &c., &c.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN THE MOONLIGHT.

But I shall experience no soothing change
Of seasons in my years of misery,
No sweet variety of night and day
To cast a cherishing delusion
Upon my melancholy waste of life.

PAUL LEGARDE was indulging in a sweet waking dream of the past, and calling up the hallowed time he knew in the ill-fated hour of his departure from England, when Lois in all her radiant beauty glided into the room and stood before him.

Coming so silently and with startling suddenness he did not at first know her, but, awakened from his reveries of the past, thought it was a shadow of the other world. He started from his seat, with eyes flashing and the awful fear the greatest and bravest feel when in the presence of the real or supposed supernatural, stared wildly at her.

Coleridge says that no man could stand in the presence of a spirit and live. The shock arising from a perfect conviction of being visited by a disembodied spirit would assuredly kill the strongest. So asserts that man of deep thought and research. Paul Legarde at that moment felt the awful tremour pending a dissolution, and might have died if Lois had not spoken. Her voice renewed the flow of life within him.

"I have been indiscreet coming upon you so

unexpectedly," she said; "I fear I have alarmed you."

He breathed deeply twice ere he had strength to answer. Recent suffering had weakened him terribly, but the foundation of his physical nature was strong, and there was the same clearing in his voice when he was able to speak.

"I am a little childish to-night," he said. "I fear you will laugh at me, Mrs. Wadmore, when I tell you that I am as nervous as a child."

"Suffering has brought you down," she said, sympathetically.

"To a shadow of what I was," he said.

Then both were silent. It was an embarrassing moment, for she knew not how to go on, and he, with a brain restored to action, was wondering what could have brought her there at such an hour. Slow to judge and impute base motions to man or woman, free from vanity and ready to smile at the thoughts of the vain, it never dawned upon him the nature of the mad impulse that governed her.

"Life is all suffering," Lois said, at last. "Tantalus is the typical being of us all. We live up to the throat in pure water and cannot drink, the rich, ripe fruit bobs against our lips and we never taste it."

"I am sorry you have adopted the philosophy of Bitterness," Paul replied. "I thought that was confined to men who warp all that is beautiful in their nature and then charge the great Author of their being with crooked ways."

"You deemed a woman's life a life of joy?"

"I have hoped that it was so with the majority, and I have desired to see it with all."

She sighed and motioned to him to sit down. There was a chair beside his, and she took it, sitting with her head slightly drooping and hands clasped before her—a pretty picture of a woman weighted with sorrow.

"You are not like the ordinary run of men," she said, "who have no real sympathy with women. They look upon us as toys, to be taken up, played with, broken, and cast aside. A woman would be rich indeed if she had your love."

"A woman has it and values it as dross," he replied.

"Has it?" replied Lois, with a tinge of scorn in her tone. "Is it possible that you still think of Vida Haverland?"

He did not answer her. The love he bore for Vida had ever been too sacred with him for discussion. To others he never spoke of it if he could avoid doing so, and now that it had been wrecked he was less inclined than ever to enter into the height and depth, the joy and misery of it.

She saw her mistake and hastened to repair it. She could never gain his love by reverting to a love of the past. If he could be won at all it must be through a feeling of compassion for her in her suffering.

"How strangely things are muddled in this world," she said. "False love is ever triumphant and true love goes a begging. When the story of your death was circulated here a true love for you maddened the heart that held it and drove a woman to despair."

He knew she was not referring to Vida then, and must have been a fool not to have read her meaning rightly. She was referring to herself, and what she said touched him strangely. A feeling of mingled pleasure and distaste filled his breast, and he was unable to tell which emotion was dominant.

"In despair," she went on, "that woman married another man, thinking he loved her. She vowed to be true to him, to hold his lightest wishes dear, for she believed in his professions. Unstrung by her own sorrow she had compassion upon the man and sought to save him from a life of woe."

"It was a noble sacrifice," Paul murmured.

"And it has bred the usual result," she answered. "Misery has come of it, for the man was fickle and hollow, and there was no real music such as love sends echoing about the universe in his fervent vows. It was all hollow with nothing in it—the tapping of a drum, the singing in an empty shell, sound without soul."

The passionate earnestness of this beautiful

woman, who could so powerfully call her emotions into play, appeared to herself as to others as a genuine outburst. As she poured out the whole story of her woes that night she would have carried away a stronger man than Paul Legarde.

He was bewildered, amazed, and interested. The shores of his soul were touched with waves of pity. Beauty in distress has its power over all, to a thoroughly sympathetic man it is irresistible.

But he still had a thought of whither he was going. As she finished her sad plaint she lifted up her eyes to his and the moonlight revealed their wondrous beauty in its most alluring form. With a nervous hand he grasped the arm of the chair on which he sat as a drowning mariner clings to a rock to escape the fierce, in-rolling tide.

To him honour was life. With honour lost he was dead, and he was bound by all that is true and noble in man to remember he was a guest and in the presence of the wife of the man who entertained and gave him the best his house afforded at a time when he was peculiarly desolate. He did not know that he owed it all to Lois. The true sentiments of Cater Wadmore towards himself were entirely hidden from him.

"Paul, we were friends once. Will you desert me now?"

He heard her appeal and it made him shudder. To give her such close communion as she plainly sought would be to put the honour of both in peril, and yet how was he to answer her?

"Mrs. Wadmore," he began, but she made an impatient movement and interrupted him.

"Do not speak the hateful name," she said. "It is like the shaking of the fetters on one that is bound, and galls and rankles the aching wound. Call me Lois—what you please—anything but the name I am doomed to bear to the world. You have called me Lois ere now."

"Lois then," he said, huskily, "forgive me if I say that I thought an hour ago I had no more to bear, but you have put another burden upon me."

"Let us bear our sad lot together," she said, eagerly. "Give me a friendship that shall never swerve—stand fast by me to save me from my impending fate. Without a stay, the man I have married will drive me mad."

"So bad as that?" said Paul, wearily.

"He grinds me down with his cold, calculating cruelty. I freeze in his presence, he fills the air with pestilence and poisons every flower in the garden of my life. Paul, Paul, what shall I do, whither shall I go to escape from my misery?"

She clasped her slender hands about his arm and by the mere power of her leaning drew him towards her. He strove to resist, feebly for him, and with a tumult of thought distracting him put his other arm around her.

"You will befriend me, Paul?"

"Yes, Lois, yes."

The upturned face was dangerously close to his, the ripe parted lips with an eloquence of their own were leading him on, when an interruption came and saved him. The voice of Cater Wadmore was heard on the stairs without calling for a servant to bring a light.

Paul unclasped her hands and she started to her feet with such a fury against her husband as she had never felt before. But she was obliged to fly from the presence of him she basely loved, for the voice of Cater Wadmore was drawing near and the flicker of a lamp being borne upstairs was already in the corridor.

"Good night—my—love," she hurriedly whispered, and stooping down gave him a despairing kiss upon the forehead and was gone.

Paul felt the kiss, but he was now fully awake again, and it gave him no pleasure. The burning flush of shame swept scarlet o'er his face and he clasped his hands over his eyes as if to hide from them the nakedness of the humiliation that stood before him.

He heard the footstep of Cater Wadmore approach and pause at the door. Then he heard him speak.

"How are you, Legarde, to-night?" he said.

"I am told you are better. If I have seemed to be remiss in looking you up you must forgive me, as I have so much to do. Why, my dear fellow, you seem to be quite cast down."

He came in and took the seat Lois had lately occupied, and Paul, with an effort that cost him more than a day's heavy labour would have done, removed his hands. But he could not look Cater Wadmore in the face. The high-sounded preaching he had often poured into that man's ears uprose like a grim and ghastly spectre before him and he felt he was branded—hypocrite.

"I—I am not so well as I was," he said, hurriedly.

"Shall I send for Danvers?" asked Cater Wadmore.

"No, I only need rest," said Paul. "You are too kind. Pray do not trouble yourself about me."

"If you should need anything in the night, Legarde, ring. The bell is by the bed in the next room. I will give my man instructions to sit up."

"But you must not, I—"

"Indeed, my dear fellow, I cannot let you go wrong for a little kindly attention. Good night, and I hope the morning will see you another man."

Cater Wadmore seized Paul's hand and wrung it with a warmth bordering on demonstration, and so heaped coals of fire upon his head. He kept up his affected interest by carefully closing the door as he went out and walked downstairs, ostensibly to give instructions for somebody to keep within sound of the bell.

But in a moment he returned with a soft, cat-like step to his wife's room. He tried the handle and finding it yielded to his touch he went in. Lois had no light, but he could see her sitting by the table resting her head upon her hand.

He went up and laid a hand upon her shoulder and she started up with a suppressed shriek.

"Do not be alarmed, madame," he said, "it is only your husband. He can have no terrors for you when you can defy the laws of God without a tremour."

"Why do you come here?" she asked.

"To tell you that I have heard every word that passed between you and that man, Paul Legarde, to-night."

"You played the eavesdropper?"

"I listened, as I had every right to do when I have a traitor in my house, who would bring it down to the dust."

"You forget—it has yet to rise. Who are you to preach in this way?—a man who cannot or will not say where he was born."

"It becomes you, madame, to taunt me, but I shall not endure it much longer. A fall cannot hurt me, as I have never risen, but I warn you that if you do not desist from your purpose and act as becomes my wife I will, at any risk, bring the light of day to bear upon you."

"Do what you please," she said, furiously; "I despise you."

"You defy me to battle?"

"I do. Let there be an end to this—no matter what end so that it is finished once for all."

He turned from her, humming a tune. At the door he paused, and in a cool, business tone said:

"Would you like to sleep upon your defiance?"

"No," she replied; "it is spoken—let it stand."

"So be it," was his answer, and he left her.

His own room was not quite in darkness, a lamp turned down was glimmering upon the table, and with a careful hand he raised the light, and having first looked his door took out several bundles of papers and sat down.

The papers were mostly documents of a very legal aspect, but there were private letters among them, some with crests stamped upon them, and at least a third were in the handwriting of women.

He sorted them out with great care, dividing parchments from draft deeds, and singling and sorting the letters, humming as he worked.

Soon all were arranged and then he added a bottle and a glass to the things upon the table.

"I shall want you, my friend, to-night," he said, as he tapped the bottle with his forefinger; "without you I shall not do half that is required of me. How many men with a reputation for bravery owe their name to you. Your power is ubiquitous, but not wisely used. To some you give pleasure, while to many you lead the way to—a grave. Good friend, you may this night lead me where you will."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CURSE OF POVERTY.

The beauty of the day.
The music of the woods, the love that stirs
Wherever nature charms her worshippers,
Are far, far away.

There are certain districts in London towards which the impoverished well-bred people sorely gravitate, and they are nearly all at the West End, "twixt earth and heaven," or in other words between the vast district where elegant ease and wealth abide and the city where Mammon sits upon his throne and directs his active worshippers in their labours.

To enumerate and name the various districts would be a waste of valuable time and space, and I will therefore confine myself to one which lies at the back of Middlesex Hospital, where there is perhaps one of the strangest brick-and-mortar puzzles to be found in the great metropolis, in the form of a collection of streets which have the power of deceiving the complete stranger, so that once in their midst he may have the pleasure of working his way up and down, in and out by the hour together, to be brought back some half-dozen times to a spot he has been endeavouring to flee from.

The inhabitants of this chosen spot deny there is any difficulty in travelling to and fro, and stoutly aver that only a dunderhead can fail to go the way he seeks, but those who have wandered there in despair ought to have some credence, and there are many men of known veracity who will confirm what is here set down.

But it is easy to get within the maze, and thither flock those who are going down the social ladder. The Haverlands when they left their all behind them went straight to it.

"It is a capital neighbourhood," said Beaumont, "so near to places and yet so out of the way. People we may not wish to meet are not likely to run against us."

He had chosen a place in a street I will give the name of Badley to. The initiated will easily recognise it when they are told it is a cul de sac with the upper windows of the houses enjoying a very good view of the back of a famous hospital. This spot has for a long time past been literally crammed with the struggling people who, in spite of their want and their woes, the bitter retrospective and their lack of knowledge of how to make their way in the world, still desire to live, and struggling nobly do just manage to exist.

The houses have a very respectable appearance when viewed in a general way. Creditable efforts are made to keep up appearances, the door steps are occasionally cleaned, a polished bell pull is not a novelty, the children are kept fairly within bounds, barrel organs have given it up as a bad job, not being encouraged, and the costermonger, sensible of being in a superior atmosphere, does not bawl and yell but rings the area bell and ask for orders in a tone of voice that would do credit to the polite purveyors of greens and potatoes whose business lies in Belgravia.

"I don't know why people should object to a second floor," said Mrs. Haverland, as they looked at the apartments Beaumont had chosen, "a few stairs more or less can make very little difference."

"And the furniture—is I suppose—not bad," said the colonel, in an undertone, as his eyes wandered about a room that had evidently been

filled up piecemeal without any regard to harmony.

The landlady, a woman of fifty with a moist eye and a tell-tale nose, overheard the remark and, in a voice that might once have been dulcet but was now husky, said:

"My husband took a pride in this room, sir. He was an auctioneer's man, sir, and used to pick up a bargain when he could. That green-covered chair with the weak leg, which I'll get mended, sir, was the last thing as ever he brought in. 'And I think the room will do, Maria,' he says, 'and nobility might come and not turn their backs on it.' And he ought to have known, seeing how often he'd been put into the houses of people as was in trouble."

Then seeing a shade settling upon the faces of her lodgers, she felt she had performed the feat known as "putting her foot in it," so she hastened to soften down the unfortunate remark.

"Which trouble will come," she said, "to the best of us, as my poor husband used to say, 'Maria,' he says, 'it's painful to look on it, and I wish as I could get out of the line, but there must be men in possession, and no sin is on those as does it for a living.'"

Mrs. Haverland asked her what the terms were, and she named them. Twenty-five shillings a week for the two rooms on the second floor and two attics, "which, though they were small, were neat and clean, and much can be done if you are only free with soap and water."

Her charges sounded reasonable in the colonel's ears, and the rooms were taken without looking at the attics, one being for Beaumont and the other for Vida.

When Beaumont went up to look at his he thought it possible there might be a lot of soap and water about it, but there was very little else.

"I ought to have looked at this before. I must keep the governor from seeing it," he muttered, as he looked at the rickety bed, the crippled wash-stand, the two square feet of carpet, and the one deplorable chair that constituted all the furniture of the place. "I hope Vida is better off."

But it seemed that Vida had a place worse than the other if possible, and brother and sister on the landing concocted a little scheme for keeping their parents from coming up to see the miserable rooms.

"We must tell them they want a little decorating," Vida said, "which we can do ourselves, and they are not to come up until we have finished."

The colonel and his wife accepted the story in all good faith, and their boxes were put into the rooms by the landlady, who was favoured by her marriage with the name of Stiffet, and a boy with a ferret face and defiant eye, who it seemed was her son.

His mother spoke highly of his virtues, among which a respect for his parents was not included, as he was heard to say on the stairs that "his mother was just like his father, and never did no more work than she could help, and would shove it on to a poor boy as soon as anybody."

The sweetness of Mrs. Stiffet evaporated slightly when she heard that her lodgers intended to "provide themselves," and a request for hot water to make tea resulted in the appearance of a jugful with the chill-off—the fire in the kitchen "being low."

"We must get a spirit lamp," the colonel said, falling back upon his campaigning experience. "I can get one that will boil water and cook anything for a couple of pounds. We shall then be quite independent."

After partaking of such tea as the lukewarm water was capable of making, finance was discussed, and it was decided that such jewellery as they had and could reasonably be spared should be disposed of and the proceeds portioned out to last a certain time.

Beaumont and the colonel thereupon went out to dispose of it.

"Now, my dear boy," the colonel said, when they were in the street, "it is possible you know London better than I do. Where is the place where we shall be most leniently dealt with?"

"At a pawnshop," replied Beaumont.

"My dear boy! A pawnshop?"

"Yes; you will get as much lent on those as any jeweller, if he guesses you are hard up, as he is sure to do, will give for them, and we shall in addition have the advantage of being able to redeem them if the tide of fortune turns."

"A gentleman in a pawnshop," said the colonel, despairingly.

"My dear father, there are pawnshops and pawnshops. I know of one that does quite a gentleman's business. Lots of our fellows have had to pop a watch or something of that sort now and then."

"It used not to be so in my time, Beaumont."

"It is so now, take my word for it. Now what we want to do is to get to Golden Square. There is a fellow just beyond who will do us justice. Let me see, this is the street we came in by."

"I think not," the colonel said.

Neither of them was sure whether it was or not, and they made inquiries which resulted in their being sent up and down for a good half-hour before they got into Portland Street. Here they were all right, as Beaumont knew the place.

Beaumont went in to dispose of the jewellery, advising his father to remain outside. The colonel at first objected to this arrangement, as he wished to share the burden of the disagreeables.

Beaumont, however, was firm and went in alone. He had been there before, and, not wishing his father to get an inkling of it, thought it wiser to leave his father out of the business part of it.

It was well he did, as the assistant recognised him with a courteous bow and hoped he was in good health.

The jewellery was looked over, a sum offered and taken.

"The old name, I suppose, sir?" the assistant said, and Beaumont, with a small red spot on each cheek, said the old name would do. He was thinking what his father would have felt had he been in the shop with him.

The little cash they had and the money they raised on being divided into sums deemed sufficient for a week's living was found to be just sufficient to last four months.

"And so much may be done in that time," the colonel said, hopefully.

He was a very different man to what he had been under the weight of impending ruin. The crash was over and he was upright and strong again. Beaumont was not quite so hopeful, for he had seen more than one fellow "go under," but he had never seen one rise again. He knew what a poor chance a gentleman had with those used to hard work from boyhood.

But what doubts he had he kept to himself, even from Vida, whom he would have trusted if he had trusted anyone at all. It was only when it came to a discussion on what could really be done that he showed any weakness.

"There is a clerk's place to be had, I suppose," the colonel replied. "A clerkship with the overlooking of a number of men would suit me. I have been used to commanding, and might really be an acquisition to a firm in want of an overlooker."

"Soldiers and mechanics are different people to deal with," Beaumont said. "There is no commanding a workman now-a-days. You have almost to take off your hat to him to ask him to do a minimum of work for a maximum of wages."

"The times are changed," sighed the colonel again.

"And what am I to do?" asked Mrs. Haverland.

"And I?" said Vida.

"Nothing—of course not," both the gentlemen said.

"If Beaumont and I can do nothing then our cases are hopeless," the colonel said, "but I am very hopeful."

"As for Vida thinking of plodding about London for work it would be madness," Beaumont said. "It can't be done."

But when on the morrow the colonel and Beaumont went out to "look about them," Vida and her mother had a little private discussion about their own movements. Both were of opinion that labour on their part was imperative. It would be cruel and absurd, they argued, for them to remain in idleness.

"We must get a daily paper and look through the list of persons wanted," Mrs. Haverland said, and Mrs. Stiffet's hopeful son was despatched to get a copy of the Times, that being the only paper in Mrs. Haverland's experience she could think of as likely to be of service.

The hopeful boy was gone a long time and brought the paper back in a twisted and rumpled condition, he having rolled it up into a faint resemblance to a policeman's truncheon, and maltreated an ancient enemy in the employ of a butcher with it, gaining in return a very neat thing in blackened eyes.

The state of the paper being pointed out to Mrs. Stiffet, that lady said she was not at all surprised, for "people in shops put any rubbage on boys, and it was always best for grown-up people who were particularly to go and pick and choose for themselves."

"What a wretched place to live in," sighed Mrs. Haverland as the door closed on the ambiguous-minded landlady.

"It is only for a time," said Vida, as she smoothed out the paper.

The wants announced in that paper were many, and then a number of people wanted mainly cooks, housemaids, and other servitors, all of whom were offered wages that would have dazzled their grandfathers and grandmothers and make them think the millennium had come, but nothing that was at all suitable for Vida appeared until they came to quite the bottom corner of the paper.

"What is this?" said Mrs. Haverland. "A gentleman of—," Vida, what do you think of this?" and she read aloud the following:

"An engagement of a lucrative character is open to a young lady. Good education and references as to position indispensable. Apply personally at No. 4, Danks Buildings, W.C., between eleven and four."

"And it is now ten o'clock," said Mrs. Haverland. "I heard a clock strike a few minutes ago." Alas for their watches they were gone, and the only clock the house boasted of was in the kitchen, where it kept what time it pleased, and made no effort to do credit to its maker by being moderately correct.

It was generally half an hour slow or forty minutes fast, and its imperfect nature was in no way compensated for by Mrs. Stiffet, whose defective memory never allowed her to remember which incorrectness it was labouring under when she had need to consult it.

But this is digression, and only serves to give an idea of the general completeness of Mrs. Stiffet's establishment, where everything was due to the limited means and occasionally eccentric enterprise of the late Mr. Stiffet, who finished an active career by getting into a waterbut under the idea that he was going to bed, and so gave himself a chill that was too much for a lifelong devotion to alcohol and settled him.

Vida thought the advertisement read well, and was indeed promising. She was also of opinion that it was advisable to be early in the field to secure this very promising appointment. Therefore they put their bonnets on with an expedition almost unequalled, and assuredly never excelled, and went off to Danks Buildings.

It was a long distance to Danks Buildings, by the way they were directed hither and thither, but they arrived there at last, and had no need to ask which was number four, for already, at five minutes to eleven, the applicants were going in.

Mostly young girls, with the curious, eager look upon their faces that speaks of a hope arising out of much disappointment and weary anxiety. Some were pretty and fresh-coloured, having in their cheeks the bloom that can only be gathered in green fields, others were thin and pale, and on more than one Death had set his sombre seal.

Mrs. Haverland was aghast, but Vida would not admit she was daunted.

"We can only try," she said, "and fortune may favour us."

So they went in with the stream, and were met in the passage by a hard-featured woman who was singling out some as they came in and sending them back with a shake of the head and a curt "You won't do," but the moment Vida appeared she wreathed a smile, no prettier than a frown, about her lips, and opening a side door, bade them walk in.

"You will find two or three ladies there," she said, "but we shall not keep you waiting."

The two or three proved to be a dozen, all young, with good looks, but some were pale with penurious living and the lack of the warmth that grows in a happy life with home and friends. Two or three were whispering together, but the rest sat mute.

In a few minutes the door opened and the woman, wearing the same repulsive smile, beckoned to Mrs. Haverland to come out, and the favour thus conferred raised a frown on every strange face in the room.

"I thought you would not like to wait," the woman said, in a whisper, "and I told Mr. Fortescue so. You will find him a very kind gentleman, and I shouldn't be surprised if this young lady will suit."

Mrs. Haverland bowed a little stiffly. She was not a proud woman in the way of the world's pride, but she had a horror of familiar strangers, especially if they were of the type of this woman, who led them to a room on the first floor and showed them in.

It was comfortably and even luxuriously furnished, and the only occupant was a man who, in the City, would have passed for being well dressed, although to the keen eyes of Mrs. Haverland he had palpably overdone it. He was about forty years of age, with a passable face and his manners were a mixture of affability and vulgarity, which sometimes manages to pass muster for gentlemanly ease.

"Pray be seated," he said, "a little nearer. Take this chair, madame. You are mother and daughter, I presume."

Mrs. Haverland bowed, and Vida felt a rising anger at the bold way the fellow fixed his eyes upon her.

"Ah, just so," he said, "you came in answer to this advertisement."

Another bow.

"I regret, madame, that the vacancy in question is filled up, but I shall have another at my disposal on the morrow, and if you wish to put your name on my books the fee is five shillings, although I think in this case"—another look at Vida—"I might overlook it."

"There is no need to depart from your rules for us," said Mrs. Haverland; "the transaction is purely a business one. You do not act entirely from philanthropic motives I presume."

"Oh, dear no—not quite," he answered, hurriedly. "Will you give me your name and address? There will be no need for you to come again; I will send on all particulars. Five shillings. Thank you."

He appeared to be flurried, but his gaze lost none of its boldness when he looked at Vida, and she was glad when all the preliminaries of taking the fee and recording name and address were completed and he rose to bow them out of the room, striking a hand-bell as he did so as a signal for the next victim to be introduced.

"What an odious man," said Vida. "I am glad we have not to call again."

"I should not have dreamt of it," Mrs. Haverland said, "but these agents are, I believe, a very inferior class of men, and we have now to run the gauntlet with other poor creatures."

"He is to send us a note to-morrow," mused Vida. "What will it bring us?"

"Good news I hope," her mother said.

They were back before the colonel or Beaumont returned, and they kept the secret of their journey close. If anything came of it, well and good, then they would speak, but if it proved fruitless, the more quiet it was kept the better.

Nothing had come of the colonel and Beaumont looking about them. They too had consulted the paper and found nothing, and a walk about an East End district had not shown them any great employer of labour thirsting for the services of a colonel and subaltern who had sold out.

The few inquiries they made at the yards of builders and timber merchants seemed to excite a little suspicion and some merriment. The colonel had a dim idea that he might have miscalculated his chances of employment in that direction, but he would not foster the idea of failure.

The next day the two men started early again, and about eleven o'clock Mrs. Haverland went out to do a little shopping, leaving Vida to dust and arrange the room, a duty first performed by Mrs. Stiffet at an early hour by flicking an old handkerchief at the mantelpiece, blowing on the backs of the chairs, and leaving the rest to fate.

Vida was very busy with her work, with a handkerchief over her beautiful hair to protect it from the dust, when the door was thrown open and Mrs. Stiffet gruffly announced:

"A gentleman to see you, miss."

Vida looked up startled, and from out the gloom of the landing, buttoned up in a frock coat, wearing a flower in his button-hole, and bowing as he came, advanced Mr. Fortescue, the very objectionable gentleman she interviewed on the previous day.

(To be Continued.)

OUR COLUMNS FOR THE CURIOUS.

THE WELD GHOST STORY.—Dr. F. G. Lee, vicar of All Saints, Lambeth, in his "Glimpses of the Supernatural," relates the following incident, which occurred about thirty years ago:—Philip Weld was a younger son of Mr. James Weld, of Archer's Lodge, near Southampton, and a nephew of the late Cardinal Weld, the head of that ancient family, whose seat is Lulworth Castle, in Dorsetshire. He was sent by his father in 1844 to St. Edmunds College, near Ware, in Hertfordshire, for his education. It happened that on April 16, 1846, a whole holiday, the president of the college gave the boys leave to boat upon the river at Ware. In the morning of that day Philip Weld had been to the Holy Communion, having just finished his retreat. In the afternoon he went with his companions for boating. This sport he enjoyed very much. When one of the masters remarked that it was time to return to the college Philip asked whether they might not have one more row. The master consented and they rowed to the accustomed turning-point. On arriving there and in turning the boat Philip accidentally fell out into a very deep part of the river, and notwithstanding that every effort was made to save him he was drowned. His dead body was brought to the college. The Rev. Dr. Cox, the president, was immensely shocked and grieved. He was very fond of Philip, but what was most dreadful to him was to have to break this sad news to the boy's parents. At last he determined to go himself to Mr. Weld, at Southampton. So he set off the same evening, and passing through London reached Southampton the next day, and drove from thence to Archer's Lodge, Mr. Weld's residence. On arriving there Dr. Cox found Mr. Weld in tears. The latter, rising from his seat and taking the doctor by the hand, said: "My dear sir, you need not tell me what you are come for, I know it already. Philip is dead. Yesterday I was walking with my daughter Katharine on the turnpike-road, in broad daylight, and Philip appeared to us both. He was standing on the causeway with another young man in a black robe by his side. My daughter was the first to perceive him. She

said to me, 'Look there, papa, there is Philip.' I looked and saw him. I said to my daughter, 'It is Philip, indeed, but he has the look of an angel.' Not suspecting that he was dead, though greatly wondering that he was there, I went towards him with my daughter to embrace him, but a few yards being between us. While I was going up to him a labouring man who was walking on the same causeway passed between the apparition and the hedge, and as he went on I saw him pass through their apparent bodies as if they were transparent. On perceiving this I at once felt sure that they were spirits, and going forward with my daughter to touch them Philip sweetly smiled on us and then both he and his companion vanished away." The reader may imagine how deeply affected Dr. Cox was on hearing this remarkable statement. He of course corroborated it by relating to the affected father the circumstances attendant on his son's death, which had taken place at the very hour in which he appeared to his father and sister. They all concluded that he was in happiness because of the placid smile on his face. A few weeks afterwards Mr. Weld was on a visit to the neighbourhood of Stonyhurst, in Lancashire. . . . While waiting for his carriage he was shown into the guest room, where, walking up to the fireplace, he saw a picture above the chimney-piece, which as it pleased Heaven represented a young man in a black robe with the very face, form and attitude of the companion of Philip as he saw him in the vision, and beneath the picture was inscribed, "St. Stanislaus Kostka," the one whom Philip had chosen for his patron. His father, overpowered with emotion, fell on his knees, shedding many tears, and profoundly thankful for this fresh proof of his son's blessedness.—*Glimpses*, by F. G. Lee, D.C.L., vol. II., p. 49.

THE AMERICAN NAVY.—Writes a Lowell paper, "The enlargement of our navy is in progress; they have got the water for a tremendous fleet, though nothing has been done towards the ships."

CHARLES THE FIRST.—The sheet which received the head of Charles the First after its decapitation is, according to Hone, carefully preserved along with the communion plate in the church of Ashburnham in Sussex—the blood now appears nearly black. The watch of the unfortunate monarch is also deposited with the linen, the movements of which are still perfect. These relics came into the possession of Lord Ashburnham immediately after the death of the king.

LOUVAIN.—Louvain may easily be seen in a day; and there is no inducement to remain longer, as the city has a deserted aspect, the more striking when contrasted with its ancient prosperity and swarming population. Its walls, now in part turned into boulevards, measured seven miles in circumference, and in the fourteenth century, when it was the capital of Brabant and the residence of its princes, its inhabitants amounted to 100,000. Nearly half of them lived by the woollen manufactures established here. The weavers here, however, as elsewhere, were a turbulent race; and their rulers, being tyrannical and impolitic, banished in 1382 a large number of them from the town, in consequence of a tumult in which they had taken part, and during which they had thrown seventeen of the magistrates out of the windows of the Town-house. Many of the exiles took refuge in England, bringing with them their industry and independence, and very much to the advantage of our country established in it those woollen manufactures which have left all others in the world far behind. Louvain is famed at present for brewing the best beer in all Belgium.

ANECDOTE OF GEORGE THE THIRD.—"Macrobios" (Notes and Queries, April, 1862), says: "Mr. Thackeray has not failed to record that in the early part of the reign of George the Third the king and queen, with the royal children, frequently walked on the terraces and slopes of Windsor, in the presence of considerable numbers of the higher classes of society. On an occasion of that kind one of the princes suddenly bolted, and running up to a lady wrapped himself in her dress. The king, observing what had happened, instantly went and withdrew the

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prince from his hiding-place, and taking off his hat, addressed the lady in these words: "Madam, the only apology I can possibly make for this rude boy is that in what he has done he has at least shown his good taste." The lady was at that time young, blooming and handsome. . . The incident was related to me more than once by the lady herself some fifty years ago, and I am probably the only person now living who can tell the tale as 'twas told to me. I do not see how Louis XIV. of France could have shown greater courtesy on such an occasion than was manifested by George the Third of England."

THE EARLS OF RADNOR.—The ancestor of the Bouveries, who now possess the Earldom of Radnor, was a native of the Low Countries. When a mere youth he fled from his native country to avoid the fangs of the Inquisition. Wandering into Frankfort, he sat down weary and depressed at the gate of a lofty mansion. The master chancing to come up interrogated him. The ingenuous lad related his simple history, and was taken into the service of the German merchant prince. After the death of his patron young Bouverie took advantage of Queen Elizabeth's liberal encouragement of foreign Protestants. He emigrated from Frankfort to Canterbury, where he carried on his silk weaving, and found freedom to worship God in the chapel assigned to foreigners within the cathedral. The second Bouverie in succession from the Canterbury immigrant was knighted, the third was created a baronet, and the fifth was raised to the peerage.

THE DUKES OF LEEDS.—In the early part of the sixteenth century there lived a wealthy cloth worker, or manufacturer of woollens, in one of the houses that then and down to a much later date stood upon London Bridge. One day in the house of the rich cloth merchant a servant maid leant out of one of the high back casements holding an infant, her master's daughter and only child, in her arms, when, in one of its bounds of delight, it suddenly sprang from her grasp, and, dropping into the rushing tide, would have been lost but for an apprentice of the merchant's named Edward Osborne, who, instantly leaping in after it, caught hold of it and brought it safe ashore. . . Some sixteen or eighteen years after this the young lady thus miraculously preserved was given in marriage to her preserver. She had several wealthy and titled suitors, but "Osborne saved her," remarked her father, "and Osborne shall enjoy her." This was the founder of the family of the Osbornes, Dukes of Leeds.

VERA'S VENTURE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"So Fair Her Face," &c., &c.

CHAPTER XXXV.

ANGRY WORDS.

Angry words are lightly spoken.
Bitterest thoughts are rashly stirred,
Brightest links of life are broken
By a single angry word.

"You disreputable old beldame, if I catch you here again, or anywhere near Milverstone, I'll have you taken up."

"Will you, Mr. Delamere?"

"Yes, I will, so take yourself off."

"That's as it may be."

And Mrs. Bird, who was very drunk and extremely aggravating, put her arms akimbo, and looked at Mr. Delamere in a defiant fashion, sufficiently provoking without her words.

He had promised his wife that he would be civil to the woman, and he had kept his word. He thought her very encroaching, and Vera strangely yielding to allow her to come about the place as she did. But he had a curious conviction that there was some reason for it, and he did not venture to gainsay anything that she beautiful and imperious wife chose to do.

His life as master of Milverstone was not exactly a bed of roses. He was freed from his most pressing creditors and he was the great man of the place in virtue of his wife. But he was estranged from his aunt, whom in spite of his carelessness and graceless conduct he really loved, and he had no friends. The county people turned their backs upon him as they did on his wife, and cold civility was all either of them met with when they encountered any of Nellie's former friends.

Scarcely anyone called on them, and sympathy was loud for the poor girl who had been turned out of her home to make room for this new scion of the house of Rivers—a girl of more than doubtful antecedents, for had she not been on the stage, and that in a very inferior position? She had not taken London by storm as Amy Hastings had done under the name of Darlington.

Springfield knew Amy Hastings. Her father had been a gentleman, who had resided in that neighbourhood, who had fallen into misfortunes, and had not been able to face the world afterwards.

He had destroyed himself, leaving his widow to the mercy of the world, and Amy's talent had been turned to account on the stage.

Springfield was rather proud of her. She was known to be a good girl. Her acting was a very different affair from the stage career of Miss Rivers, of which all sorts of queer reports got about as soon as she was installed at Milverstone.

Most of them were false. Vera had been not worse than most of her confreres on the stage, and a great deal better than some, and there was not the slightest occasion for anyone to turn up their eyes or shrug their shoulders at any act of hers.

She was too proud to fall into the common follies of her sex, and her husband could afford to laugh at stories concerning her which have made many a man extremely uncomfortable.

She was out on this particular day, gone to London on some business with Mr. Shackleton, and she had peremptorily ordered him to stay at home; in point of fact it was to ask some questions about him that she wanted to see her lawyer. Neville was not scrupulous, and she had an idea he was trying to raise money in some fashion which would bring discredit on them both by-and-by.

Betty Bird had grown more and more troublesome as the time had gone on. She certainly had some hold on Vera or she would not have been so ready to comply with all her requests. They were not so much for money—one but Miss Rivers herself knew how much she managed to get out of her in coin of the realm—as mendacious attempts to put herself on a footing as it were with the mistress of the Grange.

To do her justice, it was only when she had been drinking that she paid these unpleasant visits, and she had certainly been indulging to a great extent on this particular day. Neville Delamere going out met her and ordered her off the place with a threat that he would make her go if she did not do it quietly.

She was not a pleasant person to look at. She was well enough when she was sober and chose to dress herself properly, but now that she was, to say the least of it, excited and had put on her gaudiest attire, she was a woman to be avoided.

She wore a flaunting coloured silk dress and a gay-patterned shawl, neither of them was put on with any grace, and a glittering watch and chain, whether gold or not perhaps Vera could have told.

In her sober senses she dressed quietly enough, and Neville Delamere shuddered as he looked at her.

Suppose anyone should come and see him talking to her! It would make things worse than ever to him.

"Get out of the place," he said again, angrily. "If Mrs. Delamere wants you she must go somewhere else to seek you. I am sick of you, and I won't have you about my place."

"Your place," and the woman turned a look of scorn upon him that made his face go all one hot flush of shame. "How long has it been your place, Mr. Neville Delamere? Your wife—and a fool she must have been to take up with a craven-hearted thing like you—won't ask your permission whom she may invite here, I fancy. She chooses to invite me, and I choose to come, and I'll choose my own time to go too. What have you to say to that?"

"Not much. I won't say—I will do. If you are not off this land in five minutes I will put up with your insolence no longer, but give you in charge."

"You will?"

"I will."

"Without consulting your wife?"

"Without consulting anyone. I am master here."

"Are you? We shall see."

She was sobered now, as far as drink was concerned, but she was almost beside herself with passion.

They were out of doors under the big trees of the avenue, which were the pride of Milverstone Grange, and she put her back against the trunk of an old oak tree and looked at him.

"See here, Mr. Neville Delamere," she said, and every trace of huskiness was gone out of her voice, leaving it shrill and clear. "You had better think twice before you meddle with me."

"I don't want to think any more about you," he said, angrily, not heeding the warning in her tone. "I repeat, take yourself away or it will be worse for you. I will go straight to the police office and—"

"And tell old Butterick to put on his official coat and come and take me up. He won't thank you for the job, but that don't matter—you won't do it."

"Why not?"

"Shall I tell you why?"

"If you like—it is immaterial."

"You won't have me molested, Mr. Delamere, because if you did your hold of Milverstone would be short afterwards. I don't want to harm your wife, but she would not be mistress of Milverstone a day after she allowed me to be insulted by you or for you, so take care what your servants do for the future."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say."

"What power have you in my wife's affairs?"

"Just this—I have but to speak the word and the fine house at your back yonder would pass away from you like snow in the sunshine. You have no more right to call yourself master of Milverstone Grange than I have to proclaim myself Queen of England to-morrow, so take time to consider before you talk of having me taken up. It's a game that wouldn't pay, even if old Butterick were able to do it."

Neville Delamere stared at her with a nameless dread blanching his cheeks and making his heart beat thick and fast. She was drunk he told himself, if not she was mad. There was no possibility of Vera's being turned from Milverstone—she held it by every right that could make it hers, and even her bitterest enemies could find no flaw in her claim.

"Go away," he said, hoarsely, "you are not fit to talk to anyone."

"Oh, yes, I am; fit to tell you a little wholesome truth, Mr. Delamere; there was something wanted to make you civil to me."

"Not nonsense like that. You may say what you please, you don't expect anyone to be credulous enough to believe such an assertion, do you?"

"You can believe it or not, it is true. I have you in my hand, Mr. Delamere. I have but to say the word and your fine fortune will fade away like Prospero's spirits—it is about as tangible. You have taxed your wife with me having a hold on her, she has told me as much, you know now what it is."

"I don't believe it; you may have what you think some hold on Mrs. Delamere, arising from your knowledge of her having been on the stage, but no one will listen for a moment to such a preposterous assertion as this. I for one will

not, and I advise you to think of what I have said to you and take warning."

"And I would have you take warning. I have borne with your insolence and that of your servants for her sake, but I'm tired of being turned from your door by your hunkies and jeered at by the fine madames in the servants' hall. Would you like to know where my power lies, and how I could bring about what I have told you of?"

"Very much."

He spoke with a sneering tone, but his heart was far from easy.

"You shall have it then. Listen."

She drew him nearer to her, though he shrank from her touch, and whispered some words into his ear.

"It is a lie!" he shouted, started out of all reason. "A foul, slanderous lie!"

"It is the truth, as there is a Heaven above us," she retorted. "You had better let me alone for the future, Mr. Delamere."

"And Mrs. Delamere knows it is?"

"Of course she does."

"Since when?"

"She knew it when she stood at the altar with you. Have a care what you do for the future. Betty Bird is not quite the powerless creature you would like to have her. Good morning, sir, and a pleasant ride to you."

Neville Delamere's horse had been brought round and they could see it from where they stood being led up and down by a groom till its master should choose to mount it.

The man wondered a little at the white face and wild eyes of the gentleman as he mounted, and respectfully asked if he were ill.

"No, confound you, mind your own business," was all the answer that was vouchsafed from his master, and Neville Delamere rode off furiously without looking back.

Had he done so he might have seen Belton Leicester emerge from behind the trees of the avenue, where he had been an unintentional listener to what had passed between him and Mrs. Bird. He had been standing there quite unaware of the proximity of the pair till he had heard the old woman's voice, and he attached no importance to her impertinent speech till he caught what she said, about turning Vera away from Milverstone.

He listened with intent after that; anything that approached the subject of what he firmly believed to be a fraud he felt himself entitled to hear, and if he could have caught the whispered words he would have done so.

He saw the dismay in Neville Delamere's face, the blank terror, for it was nothing else that blanched his cheeks and glazed his eyes, and knew quite well that there was something more than mere words to produce it.

"What can she have told him?" he asked himself. "Where is the mystery, and what has she to do with it? It has something to do with Mrs. Delamere's former life, I feel sure of that. Ah, my darling, my darling, if I could only find you, and see you in your own place, once more—for it is yours let them say what they will—I think I could bear to see you another man's wife if you loved him. It's a weary world; perhaps we shall all know some time why things seem to go so contrary in it."

No one but himself knew how much time and money he had spent in his search after the missing Nellie. Poor child, if she had thought what a loving heart was waiting and mourning for her surely the world would have been brighter for her, and she would have been content to be Belton Leicester's wife.

Many a time since she had been deprived of all she had thought of him, and with the thought came the knowledge that she loved him; she wondered at herself that she had not found it out before, but she had been dazzled by Neville Delamere's flashy accomplishments and deceived by his winning manners, and her fancy had accepted him and she thought it was her heart.

But that was all past to her now, poor girl, and she would never see either of them again—she had dropped out of their lives, and she was Miss Smith, Amy Darlington's dresser—about on a level with her own maid Wilson of former days.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A GLEAM OF HOPE.

Hope, like the gleaming taper's light,
Adorns and cheers the way,
And still as darker grows the night
Emits a brighter ray.

Mrs. Leicester pursued his way after what he had heard sorely perplexed in spirit. All along he had felt sure that there was fraud in Vera's possession of Milverstone, but he could see no way to prove his suspicions. He knew enough of Betty Bird to be sure that if he approached the subject with her and accused her of having spoken as she did that she would deny it outright.

Not very long before all the changes that had taken place at Milverstone, and while Betty was in the depths of poverty, he had heard Mrs. Deacon lecturing her for using her tongue too freely. It was about a very trifling matter, and Betty had got out of the difficulty by declaring, in the most penitent manner, that she did not know anything about it, that she had been drunk when she said the offending words, and nothing had been farther from her mind than to give offence to anyone.

Were he to accuse her of having spoken as she did and demand to know what she meant, she would be ready with the same excuse, doubtless, and be on her guard for the future. He must watch—watch both her and the new owners of Milverstone. There was more to come of Vera's successful claim, he was sure, than had already appeared.

He was on his way to Raybrook when he accidentally came upon Neville Delamere and the old woman. He had fancied there was a slight change in the poor squire of late, and he longed to propose a remedy which his skill told him would be efficacious. He had mentioned it at first when the other doctors were summoned from London, but the great men had peeped his suggestion and rather treated him as if he were an inexperienced beginner. He had felt annoyed, but he had not liked to press the point, which, after all, was uncertain.

Now he felt a little differently. Mrs. Blennerhasset had learned to like him and trust him, and he had been a great stay and aid to her in her loneliness. He helped to cheer her more than she had ever thought anyone could, and always bade her hope for the best. He would not allow that the squire would not get well, it was quite possible that his senses would return and that he would get about.

She tried to believe him, but she had come to be in a certain way content with her lot and to think that the silent figure on the bed would be all she would ever have again of the husband who had loved her so well. It would have been almost better if he had been killed outright, she sometimes thought, till Belton Leicester, with his cheery words and frank, hope-inspiring face, bade her put away such dismal thoughts and look forward to a brighter future.

She met him on this day with a tearful face—she was generally calm—and he wondered at her agitated look and her broken speech.

"What has happened?" he asked, softly.

"Nothing serious, I hope."

"I don't know—perhaps nothing, but he is different, Mr. Leicester. He seems to look about him as if he was wondering."

If she were not deceiving herself it was a great step in the right direction, but he feared she must be mistaken.

"Shall I go up to him?" he asked.

"He is asleep now, or I should not be down here," she replied. "They are to call me the minute he opens his eyes."

Mrs. Blennerhasset had a trusty nurse who attended on the invalid, doing everything for him with the assistance of his own man, who had grown grey in the Raybrook service and would not leave his master, and she was obliged to confess that the two between them did far better than if she had done what at first she would have liked to do and attended on her helpless husband herself.

She looked at Belton Leicester with critical eyes as he sat opposite to her on the sofa.

"Are you ill, Mr. Leicester?" she asked.

"No."

"Troubled about something, then?"

"You have quick eyes," he said, with a smile.

"Yes, I am troubled, more than I can tell."

"What about? Ah! forgive me! Perhaps that is a question I should not put. If it is about any of your village work can I not help you?"

"It has nothing to do with my work, Mrs. Blennerhasset," the young man replied, "and I don't see that anyone can help me, for I have nothing tangible yet to go upon. It is only my old belief roused again that there has been a fraud in all this wicked business."

"I am certain of it," the lady said, warmly. "I always have been, but how or where I cannot imagine. The lawyers say it is all right—even Mr. Venables—and they ought to know."

"So they ought, but if there is any justice in Heaven, and I think there is, we shall see some time that they have all been mistaken. I can talk to you about it without being thought a madman. I verily believe that Mrs. Deacon thinks I am a monomaniac on the point. She always smiles with supreme pity or contempt, I am not quite sure which, whenever I broach the subject to her."

"What have you heard? What have you found out?" asked Mrs. Blennerhasset, eagerly.

"Have you any news of her?"

"No. Would to Heaven I had; but I don't despair. What I heard to-day was from a very unreliable source, but I believe from my soul it was true. I heard that old vixen, Betty Bird, tell your nephew that a word from her could take Milverstone away from him."

"Betty Bird?"

"Yes."

"I always thought that woman had something to do with Vera Rivers. What can it be?"

"I did not hear. She whispered it into his ear and it took all the colour out of his face. Mr. Delamere of Milverstone is not a happy man, I am sure."

"I don't believe he is," the good lady said, with tears in her eyes. "I am sorry for all that has come and gone, and I miss the lad in spite of his wickedness. He is my dead sister's son, and I promised her he should be as a son to me. So he was till this woman came between us."

"She is a bad woman, Mrs. Blennerhasset. She would come between any two people who loved each other, and thrust them apart to serve her own ends. She would not stop at murder to attain any object."

"Murder? Oh! Mr. Leicester!"

"I am talking in a safe place," he said, smiling, "or I should not make such an assertion. I believe the day will come when I shall be asked to make it in public. You remember the girl whose place she took in the house yonder before she claimed to be its mistress?"

"Wilson? Yes. A very good maid she was in her quiet way. I got her a situation when she left Milverstone."

"She was as nearly sent out of the world by poison as was compatible with the safety of the person who wanted to get rid of her."

"Poison! Do you mean to say that that woman wanted to murder her, Mr. Leicester?"

"No, I don't think she did, but she wanted her place, and she knew what would make her ill. I know what she bought for the purpose and where she bought it, and something else too that I have an idea she found useful. Did you ever see those letters, Mrs. Blennerhasset?"

"The ones she found?"

"Yes."

"No, but I heard enough about them. I remember something about them years ago, when we had little notion what was in them. Sir Darcie was in an awful way about something, no one knew what."

"I believe the whole thing will turn out to be an imposition, and that some day we shall see the right owner back."

"Heaven grant we may. I believe it would bring my poor old man back to life, though he doesn't know anything about it yet. Wasn't it strange that the accident should happen the

very night of all the fuss? It seemed as if it was to be. I believe he would know about it if anyone did."

"I must get at Betty Bird's antecedents," Belton Leicester said. "This much I know: she was not always the wretched creature she has seemed here. She was an actress and acquainted with Mrs. Delamere's parents."

"And she's keeping some wicked secret for her," the squire's wife said, excitedly. "That's it, Mr. Leicester; she must be made to speak."

"I am afraid that would be a difficult matter if she did not choose. Drunken people are always the most difficult to deal with, they can lay everything to the score of their falling. They can deny everything point blank, as I have no doubt she will when the time comes to question her."

"Oh, why did that poor child run away?" Mrs. Blennerhasset said, with tears in her eyes. "Why did she not stay and let us take care of her? She should have been a dear daughter to me, and something better still to you. I am thinking, Ah, you needn't look at me like that; we old women have eyes, Mr. Leicester, and I have read your secret this many a day."

"I seem to have carried my heart upon my sleeve," he returned, sadly, "and Heaven knows I did not mean to. I do love her, and now that there is little chance of my ever seeing her again I don't mind confessing it."

"But you will see her again, she will be found some day, and if she is and says you may when you ask her she won't be the Nellie I take her for."

"I shall never ask her, madame."

"Not if we find her and she is willing, as she will be? She liked you even while she was blinded by that wicked nephew of mine. Your sheltering arms would be a haven of rest for her, poor child. And you love her."

"As I love my life."

"I don't think I quite understand you. Why would you not ask her? She is friendless and alone. Is that it?"

"That would be the first reason for trying to win her. How can I ask her to marry me, knowing as I do, feeling sure that some day she will come to her own again? It will look as if I traded on my belief. I will do all I can to help her and bring her back, and it will be done, and then—"

"And then what?"

"I will turn my back upon England for ever, thankful to know that she is happy and at rest."

"It strikes me we are both talking nonsense," Mrs. Blennerhasset said, smiling, though the tears were in her eyes. "We had better go upstairs. I think. Ah, here is nurse. Is he awake, nurse?"

"Yes, ma'am."

They went up to the pleasant room where the squire lay. It was airy and comfortable and in summer had been a very bower of flowers and greenery.

"He loves flowers so," Mrs. Blennerhasset had said when Mrs. Deacon expressed her surprise at the trouble taken for one who apparently could neither see nor hear. "And though he's lying there so still I don't know that he doesn't see and smell them."

So the flowers held their place all through the bright weather, and now they had given place to all sorts of comforts that the squire had been used to. The room was arranged just as if he were going to get up and occupy the easy chair that stood invitingly by the fire, and his dressing gown hung where it could be reached at a moment's notice.

His eyes were wide open as the young doctor and his wife entered the room, and it really seemed to Belton Leicester as if there was some little speculation in them. They were not so glassy as they had been and they moved slightly, following them about the room as it seemed.

"Is it good or bad?" asked Mrs. Blennerhasset, in a whisper.

"Good, I hope," was the reassuring reply, and Mr. Leicester, as he bent over the still figure on the bed, felt sure that he was right in his idea and that the squire might be cured.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

RECALLED TO LIFE.

It seemed no force could wake him from his place, But there came one who with a kindred hand Touched his wide shoulder.

"WILL you trust me, dear lady?" was the question put by Belton Leicester to Mrs. Blennerhasset, after a long and careful inspection of her husband's state.

"That I will," was the hearty reply.

"But what I wish to do may fail. I don't believe it will, but it may, and then—"

"And then I shall know that what was done was for the best," she said, holding out her hand cordially. "Mr. Leicester, I know you would restore my poor old man if you could, if it cost you your right hand."

"I think I would if it cost me my life," was the grave answer, "but I have good hope that it will be at no such sacrifice. I am sure that he can be cured. I don't say that he will ever be the bright, hearty gentleman everyone remembers him, but you may have many years of peaceful life together."

"Don't say it—don't make me hope it yet," the poor lady said, with tears. "Mr. Leicester, I could not bear the disappointment—the grief—if—"

"We will not have any," he said, gently, in a firm voice. "It shall be a certainty, with Heaven's help," and then he took her hand and thoroughly explained to her what he wished to do. She did not understand the technical terms of course, but she comprehended all that was meant. The operation proposed would be a risk. If it failed to relieve what Mr. Leicester declared to be only pressure on a vital part of the brain, the squire would never regain consciousness as long as he lived. If it succeeded, as he hoped and believed it would, there would be an amendment, and in due time a complete recovery of reason and speech, provided no excitement or anxiety were allowed to interrupt the good work.

"You will do it yourself?" Mrs. Blennerhasset said, in a trembling voice. "You will not trust it to anyone else?"

"I had better not promise that," he said, gravely. "I am but a tyro compared to half a dozen men I could name, Sir Marcus Judd, for instance."

Sir Marcus Judd was one of the doctors they had summoned from London at the time of the accident. He was one of the first surgeons of the day, and he had negatived the proposal of the village doctor to operate on the squire at once with a covert scorn that wounded Mr. Leicester greatly.

"I can't bear to think of the way that man treated you," the good-natured lady said. "I saw it even in the midst of my grief. He sneered at you as if you were a boy."

"So I am in experience compared to him. I do not think he would sneer at the proposal now, and there is not a man in the profession with a surer hand or quicker eye. You had better send for him and hear what he says."

Mrs. Blennerhasset hesitated. She did not want Sir Marcus Judd, she said, but Mr. Leicester was firm. Without the sanction and assistance of the great London surgeon he would not undertake the operation. He had small fear of opposition now, he said. The symptoms that had developed themselves warranted immediate measures.

So Sir Marcus Judd was telegraphed for, and came with what speed he might, and they awaited his verdict with such impatience as those only know who have watched and wept by the side of all they hold most dear on earth. But they need not have feared. The clever face had no shade on it when Sir Marcus came to them and told them that Mr. Leicester was right, and that there was room for hope that an operation would be attended with success. Very gracefully he made his apologies for his difference of opinion on that former occasion.

"You had the clearer perception, Mr. Leicester," he said, in a cordial fashion that was worth a whole lifetime of fees, the young doctor de-

clared afterwards to his friends. "You were right about the operation, though it might have been premature to perform it exactly when you proposed."

"I have no doubt it would," was the ready reply. "Mr. Blennerhasset was scarcely able to bear it then. Will you fix a time, Sir Marcus, and allow me the pleasure of meeting you when it is performed?"

"I shall not perform it, Mr. Leicester."

"Not undertake it, Sir Marcus? Why?"

"Because you have a steady hand and a cool head. It is your right—you proposed it, and I can see in Mrs. Blennerhasset's eyes that she would like it. I will be here with pleasure if I can be of any use."

"Oh, if you please," the squire's wife said; "and you were right, Sir Marcus, in thinking that I should like Mr. Leicester to do it—no offence to you—but no one but me knows what he has been to me in all this dreadful time, and I think my husband, if he could speak or know anything about it, would like it too."

The tears were in her eyes as she spoke. She was unfeignedly glad that the great man had done Belton Leicester the justice that was his due, and delighted to think that his hand and none other would attempt the operation that was to end their suspense one way or the other.

Sir Marcus went away after fixing a time for his return unless any unfavourable symptom should intervene, in which case they were to telegraph to him and arrange another day.

He walked to the station arm in arm with the village doctor. Perhaps he was a little conscious that he underrated Mr. Leicester's powers when he was at Springfield before, and had spoken somewhat slightly of his opinion as regarded the squire.

Any way he made up for it by his marked attention and friendliness. He was not a bad-hearted man, only somewhat coleric and hasty, and he felt that he had done an injustice that might be mischievous.

All Springfield saw him and Mr. Leicester together, and immediately forgot what they had heard about the squire, and the difference of opinion about him.

Somehow—no one knew exactly how—the news of what was going to be done got abroad in the place, and Belton Leicester was beset by eager inquirers.

Was it really true that Mr. Blennerhasset would get well again? he was asked on all sides, and he answered yes, with Heaven's help, he believed he would.

The news was received with delight by all except the master and mistress of Milverstone. What reason Vera Delamere had to dread the recovery of the squire she best knew, but she did dread it with a fear that sent the blood from her face when she heard it, and made her heart leap with an undefined terror that was almost like death.

"I don't wish any harm to him," she said, after a few minutes, during which she had somewhat recovered herself, "but I hope you are mistaken."

"Why? What can he do?" inquired Neville, to whom she had been speaking.

"I don't know. That's just it, it is the being in the dark that is so dreadful. Your aunt has always affirmed that he knew something about those letters. I think I can set her at defiance there unless the recovery is something miraculous."

Mr. and Mrs. Delamere were on very good terms when the former brought home the news of the hope of the squire's restoration. There had been a quarrel of such fierceness between them that the servants had been alarmed, and feared that something more than mere words would come out of the angry recrimination that was going on in Mrs. Delamere's morning room. No one knew what the cause was exactly, but there was enough heard to let the household know that old Betty Bird had something to do with it, and that their master was accusing their mistress of having kept a secret from him.

Both of them passionate and anything but reticent when their tempers were aroused, they said a great deal more than they would have



[AN IMPENDING REVELATION.]

cared for their servants to hear in their anger, and Vera was excessively provoked with herself for having been so foolish as to speak.

"We must make the best of the knowledge," she said to her husband. "I could not have acted differently."

"You could have told me, you knew it before—before—"

"Before our wedding-day, I grant you, but only the day before—would any woman in my position have risked all she held dear in the world by making such an assertion?"

"Some women would."

Was he thinking of Nellie as he spoke—Nellie, who would have risked all for the right, no matter at what cost to herself, and comparing her with the wife who had given him what had been his aim—Milverstone and its revenues?

There had been times since his marriage with the proud, scornful woman who had taken Nellie's place when he would have given his life almost to be free. He was not so infatuated nor so blind as not to see the esteem in which he was held by everybody, and to be galled beyond measure by the coldness of those whom he had called his friends before his dastardly rejection of Nellie in her distress.

But he was fascinated by the woman who held him in bondage, drawn to her he could hardly tell how, as wicked women have the power of drawing men, till he was as helpless in her hands as ever was bird under the fascination of a snake. His beautiful wife could do what she chose with him, and now that he was the sharer of the secret which Betty Bird had told on the day before she joined him in London he was more than ever her tool and slave.

"I am not one of the women, Neville," she said to him, putting her arms round his neck—she well knew how to deal with him, Dalilah that she was; "where my love is concerned I am the weakest creature alive—I could not risk losing you."

"You should have told me, my queen," he said in his falseness, knowing very well that if she had it would have put an end to their mar-

riage. "I could have helped you to keep the secret then as well as now."

"I chose to make sure of you," was the proud retort, "your interests once mine there was less probability of your doing mischief in the future. We must make common cause now, Neville."

There was the shadow of that knowledge whatever it was between them now when the news came of the hope that was dawning at Raybrook, and it fell on them both with a cold chill.

"I don't believe it," had been Vera's first reception of the tidings—"won't" would have been the truer word to use.

"I do," her husband replied. "Sir Marcus Judd says it, and his opinion is not to be despised. There is just a chance that the rallying may be death."

Mrs. Delamere did not say in words "I wish it may," but she did wish it as woman never wished anything before. To her the death of the squire would have been the pleasantest news that anyone could have brought her.

But Mr. Blennerhasset was not to die. At the time appointed Sir Marcus Judd arrived from London, and all Springfield was on tiptoe with expectation and hope.

What the nature of the operation was very few people knew, the popular belief inclining to the opinion that the squire was going to have his head taken off and put on again or something equally absurd.

Whatever it was seemed a very simple affair to the anxious hearts waiting for the result—there was no display of terrible instruments or preparations, and yet the work to be done was almost the most critical operation ever performed in surgery.

Sir Marcus brought an assistant down with him, and the two with Belton Leicester, who was very pale but self-possessed, shut themselves up in the sick-room after having asked for all they wanted.

The time was not long, though it seemed like weary hours to the watchers, before the door softly opened and Sir Marcus Judd came to where Mrs. Blennerhasset was sitting with Mrs.

Deacon, who had come to be with her in the time of anxiety and trial.

The rector's wife, with all her hardness, was a kind and gentle friend in time of trouble, and she was supporting the almost fainting wife as she watched and waited for the tidings of failure or success.

There was no gloom on the face of the famous surgeon as he took her cold hand.

"All is well," he said, softly.

"Well?"

"Yes, the operation is over, and happily. Your husband will live, please God, Mrs. Blennerhasset, and be himself again. Mr. Leicester has saved his life and reason for you."

She started up as to make her way to the room where he lay, but the pent-up agitation of the weary waiting overpowered her and she sank back fainting in Mrs. Deacon's arms.

"A very good thing," Sir Marcus said, as he helped to lay her on the couch. "Let her alone, my dear madame, she will revive soon. It is of vital importance that there should be no agitation yonder. He will do very well if he be kept quiet, and I would rather they did not meet yet. He has asked a question already—he is quite unconscious of anything that has happened while he has been ill—I have charged Mr. Leicester to satisfy him if possible."

"What is it? Is it anything any of us can do?"

"I am not sure; it is about the poor girl who was driven away from here—Miss Rivers—he wants her."

It was all true; the squire's reason had come back to him, feebly enough but surely, and his first intelligible word faintly spoken and born of what wandering fancy Heaven only knows, had been the name of Nellie Rivers.

"Where is Nellie?" he asked. "I want her."

And saying it he dropped into the sleep that was to help to bring him back to life.

(To be Continued.)



[HER WEDDING MORN.]

MYRA'S MISTAKE. (A COMPLETE STORY).

CHAPTER I.

PROPOSED FOR.

SHE was a pale, thin, delicate-looking girl and she lived in a small cottage near the river's bank at Chelsea.

Her father had been an actor, her mother had eloped with him and thereby estranged her friends, but both father and mother were dead now and Myra lived with a gaunt, stern old woman whom she called "Aunt," and the two were waited upon by a still more eccentric-looking individual who went under the by no means enviable name of Jezebel.

Whether Jezebel received her name from her godfather and godmothers, or whether it was bestowed upon her by her mistress, the present writer knoweth not, suffice it for the purpose of our story that such was the appellation by which she was generally known.

Thus Myrtle Cottage was inhabited by Miss Muswell, by our little heroine, and by old Jezebel.

Now Myrtle Cottage, unlike most cottages so near London, was possessed of quite an extensive garden.

The cottage and grounds were freehold property, nothing but a detestable railway company armed with an Act of Parliament could compel the present owner to part with it, and as the railway company was considerate enough to take its line in another direction, Miss Maria Muswell smiled grimly and refused with evident enjoyment the most liberal offers for her coveted land.

For grand mansions had sprung up like ochre-coloured mushrooms all around Miss Muswell's modest habitation, mansions without one foot of ground to dignify with the name of

garden, and the old woman lived amongst them, feeling like a queen among her neighbours, because she just happened to possess what they all desired and had not.

Little Myra had passed a very dull, uneventful life in the small house with the large garden near the river.

She could not remember her parents, and when she asked about them she was always answered curtly and sharply and told that the less she knew about them the better, since they were neither of them good examples to follow.

All of which sank into the girl's heart, and it was not until a year or two after she had reached womanhood that she learnt, with what deep thankfulness only those who have spent their lives under such a dread can know, that, so far from having committed any crime, her father was an accomplished gentleman, who having lost his fortune had adopted the stage as a profession, and that her mother to the day of her death never regretted marrying him.

But Miss Maria Muswell, who was her mother's eldest sister, looked upon the stage as the sure road to perdition and never spoke of her dead sister's husband without a shudder.

And yet there were people who were malicious enough to hint pretty broadly that in her younger days Miss Maria would have been very glad to save her sister by eloping with the handsome young actor in her stead.

But this bit of scandal never reached Myra's ears.

As I have said, the knowledge of her father's talents and goodness came upon her like a revelation, and henceforth she was in danger of going to the other extreme of thinking the stage the noblest and grandest of all professions.

Poor Miss Maria after her years of careful training would have been horrified to the last degree if she could have seen her niece rising with the sun or sitting up till the small hours of the morning studying Shakespeare and our other great dramatists, of whose works she had found copies in a lumber room under the roof among some of her father's papers.

If stolen fruit is sweet, stolen knowledge is sweeter still, and Myra hid her treasures even from indulgent Jezebel and made light of the remarks about her pale cheeks and weary-looking eyes, and only replied carelessly when pressed upon the subject:

"Oh, I am always pale."

Though Miss Maria Muswell lived in such a small house, she was a very important personage in her way.

Among the narrow sect of Dissenters to which she belonged she was a burning and a shining light.

She gave liberally, she never hid her good deeds under a bushel, and she never denied the assertion, time after time hazarded in her presence, that she was a woman possessed of considerable wealth.

All of this tended to make her much sought after, and, had she been inclined to do so, she might have daily entertained a host of visitors.

Amongst the favoured few who were admitted to partake of her frequent hospitality was one of whom it is necessary that I should speak.

Jabez Jarrett—hestyled himself the "Reverend Jabez Jarrett"—was at this time a man of some thirty-eight or forty years of age.

In his way the reverend gentleman was rather a handsome man, though some critical people were disagreeable enough to say that he looked coarse, and others, still more outspoken, declared him to be vulgar.

But Miss Muswell had lived out of the society of refined ladies and gentlemen for so many years that Mr. Jarrett's shortcomings did not strike her as forcibly as they would otherwise have done, and as for poor Myra she had never spent an hour in converse with a really polished man of intellect in her whole life.

So when Mr. Jarrett made his first appearance these two women accepted the new-comer pretty much at his own valuation, and it is almost needless to remark that the estimate was by no means a modest one.

The reverend gentleman was tall and stout with a certain sleek oiliness about him that was

apt to prejudice keen judges of character against him.

Myra disliked the man instinctively. She was moreover afraid of him, and yet she thought him clever and very good, and she reproached herself over and over again for the shrinking distrust which he excited in her mind and which she could never quite overcome.

For a time Mr. Jarrett paid his attentions impartially to aunt and niece; he was doubtful which it would be safer and best for him to marry.

A chance remark made by the elder woman decided him.

"Myra is my only relative," she said, sadly, "and all I have will one day be hers."

He tried very hard after this to find out how much the "all" amounted to, but without success. Miss Muswell could keep her own counsel as well as anyone when she was inclined to do so.

But from that day Mr. Jarrett became Myra's suitor.

The more his attentions became pronounced, the more the girl shrank from him, but this the unctuous saint ascribed to maiden modesty, and he very wisely addressed himself to Myra's aunt instead of urging his suit with Myra herself.

Miss Muswell gave an attentive ear to the story. She had expected this confidence, the match would meet with her unqualified approval, and she graciously promised to talk to her niece on the subject and ascertain the state of her feelings.

The old lady kept her word, but the inquiry was not altogether satisfactory.

Myra wept and protested that she hated the man, and that she would rather die than marry him.

"But he is such an excellent creature, such a true saint, my dear child," said Miss Muswell, soothingly.

"He makes my flesh creep when he touches me," exclaimed the girl, with a shudder.

"And he eats muffins enough for three saints," here interposed Jezebel.

"I wish you would mind your own business, Jezebel," observed Miss Muswell, sternly, then to the girl she said:

"I am an old woman, Myra, I can't hope to live very long, and when I am dead unless you marry there will be no one to protect you, and I would gladly spare you if I could from experiencing the bitterness that has saddened my own life—the bitterness of living unloved, uncared for, and alone. But we will not talk about it now, my dear; think the matter over in the solitude of your own chamber, and pray that you may be guided aright in your choice, and remember that a man's life and a woman's are unequal. We cannot seek love, we must wait until it is offered us, and sometimes we wait a lifetime and wait in vain."

And the old lady, who was not always so mild and gentle of speech, kissed the girl's forehead and went out of the room, taking the servant with her.

"I hope she won't take him, I do—I do—I do!" screamed Jezebel, jumping up and down defiantly in front of her mistress like a grotesque doll set upon springs.

"You're a wicked old creature to say so, and I forbid you to utter such a thought to Myra," said Miss Muswell, angrily.

"And he's a canting hypocrite—a canting hypocrite, that's what he is!" cried Jezebel, still dancing about like an animated teetotum. "And I'd like to scratch his eyes out—I would—that I would!"

"You will oblige me by keeping in the kitchen till you regain your senses," said her mistress, sternly, as she coolly pushed the woman into the room in question and quietly locked the door upon her.

No evil resulted from this somewhat arbitrary exercise of power, however, for Jezebel cooked the dinner as well as usual, and forgot altogether that she was a prisoner until her mistress came to release her.

And, meanwhile, Myra remained in her own

room a prey to a host of tumultuous feelings that had been hitherto unknown to her.

Ever since she had discovered her late father's old volumes of plays Myra Marlow had led a dual existence. Alone with her beloved books she dreamed of heroes and of heroines whose blissful lives were ultimately crowned with the rewards of faithful love, even though they went through much agony and tribulation before the desired end was gained.

Still the time of triumph and reward always did come in the long run, and, arguing from these examples, Myra had hugged the assurance to her heart that a glorious lover would one day present himself before her, and woo and win her, and like the good people in a fairy tale she would be "happy ever after."

But the fairy prince did not put in an appearance, and Mr. Jabez Jarrett stood waiting in his stead.

In contrast to the ideal life which she lived when hidden away with her books was the dull, monotonous routine which day after day and week after week seemingly sufficed for the inmates of the cottage.

Breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper came as unflingly as did the hours themselves, and the small household duties, the making of coarse clothing for poor people, and the numerous services at the chapel and school-room, helped to fill up the total of poor Myra's life.

Mr. Jarrett's proposal had come like a bomb-shell into this quiet household.

As we have seen, Myra would have refused it without consideration, but her aunt's words and her unusual tenderness sank into the girl's heart, and when she was left alone she sat stunned and bewildered, knowing not what to do.

Her instinct and all that was womanly and rebellious in her heart said:

"Refuse him! have nothing to do with him, and take the consequences. Let those consequences be what they will they cannot be worse than being tied for life to such a man."

And yet, except unreasoning prejudice, she had nothing to urge against this suitor. All people whom she knew except Jezebel spoke well of him, and Jezebel's opinion was not entitled to much consideration.

And then her aunt had talked of loneliness; of being left solitary in the world with no strong arm and no enduring love to support and shield her, and, strangely enough, this argument had been more potent to Myra's mind than any others could have been.

And there she sat all that long morning at her bedroom window, looking out upon the spacious garden, her eyes hardly taking note of the glorious beauty of the summer flowers, her senses hardly conscious of their rich perfume, for her mind was sorely troubled and anxious, and she was afraid to trust her own judgment, still more afraid to give the rein to her own feelings. Suddenly, however, she rose to her feet.

She would yield to this indecision no longer. Her aunt was not, as a rule, either gentle or sympathetic, but she was always just, and she was clever, and Myra believed in her judgment and was prepared to be led by it rather than by her own.

So she walked downstairs with a firm step but a palpitating heart, and going up to where the gaunt old lady sat, she said, like a child repeating a lesson she had just learnt:

"Aunt, I will do whatever you wish and think right and best for me."

Miss Muswell looked up with a start, and her yellow face slightly flushed as she asked:

"But what are your own feelings, Myra?"

The girl shivered, but she answered never a word, and Miss Muswell turned away to hide the pained look on her own countenance.

So the matter stood undecided until Mr. Jarrett came that evening smiling and confident to know his fate.

He saw that matters were not progressing as pleasantly as he desired, but he was not a man to accept defeat easily, and he so played his cards that night that Miss Muswell told him before he went away that Myra had consented to

be guided by her, and that the match had her approval.

"But I would not say much to Myra about it if I were you for a little while," said the old lady, nervously.

A hint that the reverend gentleman acted upon in so far that he did not inflict upon Myra any lover-like demonstrations.

But the marriage must be talked about, for the day had to be fixed, and the sanctimonious lover was in a great hurry to claim his bride.

"Should there not be some arrangements with regard to settlements?" Miss Muswell had asked, when the lover was so importunate with regard to time.

"No, I strongly disapprove of settlements," was the hasty reply. "I do not think there should be any legal complications to breed dissension between husband and wife; the union should be complete, the bond mutual. All I have in the world will be Myra's when she is my wife."

And then he began to talk about marriage as a symbol of the union between the Church and its Head, but this portion of his discourse I spare you.

He forgot to mention that his worldly possessions would not amount to five pounds and that the true reason why he objected to settlements was that he meant to appropriate the whole of Myra's property immediately after they were married.

There was one thing, however, which he could not ascertain and that was the amount of money that really belonged to the girl.

Once or twice he did approach the subject, but he could learn nothing definite.

Myra in truth knew nothing about the matter herself, and with all her folly in being so easily imposed upon by this man, Miss Muswell was shrewd enough to see that there was no need for explanations unless the aid of the lawyers was required.

So she replied, a trifle coldly:

"All I have will be Myra's, but you can go and see my lawyer if you like."

Mr. Jarrett did not like to do so, however.

He had a strong suspicion that the lawyer would see through him, and that he might be impertinent enough to institute inquiries about his position and antecedents, and at the present stage of affairs this would be exceedingly inconvenient.

Indeed time was becoming a matter of so much importance to the oily schemer that he urged, and not without success, the necessity for a speedy marriage and a private one.

He hinted very broadly that there were so many fair members of his congregation who were anxious to marry him that it would be desirable for the ceremony to take place at church, and for no one to know about the matter until it was an accomplished fact.

To all of which Miss Muswell blindly assented. It seemed to the poor old lady afterwards in looking back to this time that her good judgment had deserted her, and that her will had become subservient to a stronger mind than her own.

And as for poor Myra, she assented to her aunt's suggestions meekly, but every day the terror and loathing that were in her soul for the man she was to marry seemed to grow and increase, and to take complete and absolute possession of her.

But her resolve was firm to obey her aunt and to do as her aunt thought best.

And thus the days went by, and the morning dawned upon which Myra was to make her great and never-to-be-forgotten mistake.

CHAPTER II.

A STRANGE WEDDING.

It was a bright morning in September. The birds were singing gaily outside Myra's window, and the sweet perfume of flowers was wafted through it into the small though pretty room.

Myra herself lay upon the bed, her eyes wide open—but very heavy—for she had scarcely

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slept all night, and her usually pale face was white as the pillow against which it rested.

The girl was in a singular condition to-day. She rose from her bed and walked to the looking-glass like one in a dream. There was a feeling of numbness about her heart that was strange to her. She seemed to have been deprived of all power to feel either pain or pleasure.

Hope and fear had alike deserted her, and she could no more have wept now than she could have indulged in a hearty fit of laughter.

In this condition of mind and body she calmly dressed herself.

She put on the new delicate linen that was waiting for her—everything but the pale lilac silk dress which she was to wear as a bride; and, donning a white morning gown in place of it, she went downstairs to meet her aunt and Jezebel.

The old servant looked at the girl pitifully, but she uttered never a word—it was too late now.

Miss Muswell herself showed more emotion than was usual with her. The tears were not far from her eyes, but she tried to smile bravely and hopefully.

Now, when she was about to lose her niece, she remembered all her gentle, loving ways, and began at last to realise that the old house would be very dull and silent when the only young, bright creature living in it was gone away.

"And it is all my work. But I am doing it for her good, only for her good," sighed the old lady, and then she went about her household duties resolutely determined to keep up bravely till it was all over.

When breakfast was finished Myra went to her room to complete her toilette.

Very fair and delicate she looked in the soft, shining silk, with the fichu of white lace and the dainty little bonnet, and so the superintendent of the Sunday school, who acted as best man, thought when he came to take the bride and her aunt to the church, where the bridegroom was waiting.

Mr. West was the only person whom Mr. Jarrett had taken even partially into his confidence.

A throb of envy filled the young man's heart when he saw Myra in all her beauty and wedding finery, for he had admired her secretly himself for a long time past.

But the difference in their respective stations in life had been too great for him to venture to propose to her, and now a still more insurmountable barrier was to be placed between them.

So he was silent and sad, and as he sat opposite the two ladies in the quiet brougham hired for the occasion, he felt as though they were all going to a funeral instead of to a wedding.

But they reach their destination, they enter the church, and to their surprise they discover that the bridegroom has not arrived.

Then for the first time this morning, the calm that had settled upon Myra broke up. A new light came into her eyes, a flush came over her cheek, she clutched her aunt's arm and said, in low, eager tones:

"He isn't come, there is time to escape; let us go away—quick, quick, before it is too late."

Her aunt looked at her in amazement, so did Mr. West, but before either of them could say a word a footstep sounded at the other end of the church, and Myra seemed to shrivel up and collapse, as though she had been suddenly petrified into quiescence.

The effect of her words upon her companions, however, was not so transitory.

Miss Muswell looked bewildered.

Mr. West began to say something about it not being too late now. But before he could finish his sentence Mr. Jarrett came forward, full of apologies for keeping them waiting, more gushing, more oily and more demonstrative than ever.

"She looks like a bird fascinated by a serpent," was Mr. West's mental comment as he saw Jabez Jarrett lead the unresisting girl to the altar.

But Mr. West was, to say the least, a very romantic young fellow.

Then the ceremony was performed which made Jabez Jarrett and Myra Marlow man and wife. The register was signed, the certificate given into the hands of the trembling girl, and then the party of four returned to the brougham and all of them got into it.

"Did you walk to church?" asked Miss Muswell, sharply, of her new nephew, as they rode back in this shabby fashion.

"Yes—no, I mean, but I dismissed the cab," he replied, absently.

"Because if I'd thought of it I would have ordered a carriage for you," she continued, with a toss of the head.

"A carriage would have attracted attention," he said, curtly.

"And suppose it had?" demanded Miss Muswell, who felt inclined to relieve her mind of her own doubts by quarrelling with her new relative; "there is no disgrace in marrying my niece, is there?" she continued, snappishly.

"I will explain myself before we go away this afternoon," he returned, suavely, though there was a look in his eyes that in no way accorded with the mildness of his speech.

Soon after this they arrived at the cottage door, and the party of four alighted.

Myra hastened into the house, but her aunt pushed before her.

Now it was too late the old woman felt as though she would have gladly given half her possessions to undo the work of that morning. She had the decency to rush to her room, however, before she gave expression to her feelings of regret.

"I ought to have known better," she moaned, throwing herself on her knees by the side of the bed. "I made her marry him and now her life is wrecked—ruined—ruined!"

She was roused from this condition by old Jezebel, who came into the room, closed the door behind her and said, sternly:

"You'd best get up and bestir yourself, ma'am. There's been a row at the door with the coachman. He asked for the driver's five shillings, and said his master told him to and would deduct it, and Mr. Jarrett hadn't got change, no more had Mr. West; and the man wouldn't go, so Miss Myra paid him. But the poor child is getting frightened at what she's done. The oily brute took her in his arms and kissed her in the passage, and she looked as though she'd have died outright, and now she's in her own room crying her heart out."

"And where is he?" demanded Miss Muswell, starting up and confronting the woman.

"In the parlour, trying to get rid of Mr. West without waiting for breakfast. But there's a man hanging about the house that I don't like the look of; he looks for all the world like a detective policeman."

"I wish to Heaven that he was one and would take the wretch away to prison; not a penny of mine should go to set him free. But there's no such luck as that."

Then Miss Maria wiped her eyes and went downstairs to meet the man who had so suddenly become a monster in her eyes.

She found him looking rather pale and nervous. He was seated at a table with Mr. West, drinking wine and eating cake.

He rose as she entered the room, gave her his seat, poured out a glass of wine for her, and said:

"I have been telling West that I have given up my charge at the chapel," helping himself again to the decanter. "I mean to travel about with Myra for a little while," he went on, "to pick up her strength and bring the roses back to her cheeks. She looked very pale to-day. Didn't you think so, West?"

Mr. West replied in the affirmative and, seeing no sign of a wedding breakfast, he rose to go.

But Miss Muswell's instincts of hospitality, aided by a desire to put off the hour which she dreaded when she would be alone with Mr. Jarrett, made her insist upon Mr. West coming into another room where the wedding breakfast was spread.

She excused the absence of her niece, who, she said, was suffering from a violent headache, and she humbly hoped she would be forgiven for uttering a lie, for she knew only too well that poor Myra's complaint was a headache.

A wedding breakfast without the presence of the bride could not be expected to be a very cheerful meal, however, and Mr. West was so much depressed by the condition of affairs that he ate little, said less, and soon took his departure.

And now the moment came which Miss Muswell, by some instinct, dreaded.

She led the way into the drawing-room, one of the two parlours which looked out upon the spacious garden.

The day had become hot, overcast and sultry. Thunder seemed to be in the air, and the old lady threw open the window till the sashes met, then caught up a fan and began to vigorously fan herself.

As a rule she was not by any means a person of infirm purpose or of weak will, neither was she very much accustomed to keep her temper or her tongue under control.

It is true that Mr. Jarrett had, during the past few months, obtained such an influence over her that she had yielded and listened and had appeared, even to herself, to be changed. But this day, when his influence should have been paramount, the spell he had exercised seemed to be broken, and, like a woman who had just regained some power she had once lost, Miss Muswell seated herself on her straight, high-backed chair close to the window, played with her fan, and prepared to listen.

"Where is Myra? why is she hiding from me?" demanded Mr. Jarrett, advancing to her side and assuming an attitude that was almost threatening.

"She is lying down, she has a headache," was the reply.

"Then I shall go to her; what room is she in?" he said, hotly.

"You mustn't go to her, she has locked herself in; she will be better soon, no doubt, and I will go and ask her to come down," was the more conciliatory reply. "But I think I understood you to say that you had changed your plans, that you had resigned your pastorate."

"Yes, I have," he replied, brusquely.

"Was it wise with your new responsibility?" she asked.

"I thought it so," he returned, haughtily, "and I consider myself the best judge of my own affairs."

Miss Muswell bowed her head in assent, but made no reply.

She was gaining fresh courage and was much less afraid of her companion than when he began to speak.

"And that reminds me," he continued, "I want to know how Myra's fortune is invested and what it amounts to."

"Myra's fortune!" echoed Miss Muswell.

"Yes; don't repeat every word I say," he returned, savagely. "What money has my wife, and where is it?"

"She has none," was the cold and steady reply. "Myra has not one penny in the world beyond what I choose to give her."

For a few seconds the man and woman stared at each other, she sitting bolt upright with an air of defiance, even of power.

And he, standing over her, his hands clenched, his eyes glaring, and with the desire of murder in his heart, held in check only by the demon fear.

Had she shrunk or shown the least fear of him Maria Muswell's life would not have been worth one moment's purchase.

But she did not.

Her eyes never quailed, she did not even rise to her feet, but she said, calmly and distinctly:

"Had you gone to my lawyer as I advised you it would have been easy for you to learn how matters stood. As you did not I have only to repeat what I have said. All I have will one day be Myra's. But it will be settled upon her for her own exclusive use, and no husband will be able to touch one farthing of it. But, pray, what

income have you now you have left the chapel—how do you propose to live?"

Jabez Jarrett when he heard this flung himself into a chair and laughed aloud. But there was no mirth in his merriment.

"By Jove, you've hooked me cleverly for your precious niece," he said, at length; "but you'll find you've hooked a Tartar. You ask what means I have. I'll tell you—I haven't a sixpence. You wonder why I resigned my pulpit—I resigned because I was obliged to do so. I had the choice of a prison or resignation, and I accepted the latter. What is going to happen now I don't know, except that you will have to maintain my wife and me."

"That I never will," exclaimed Miss Muswell, firmly. "Myra may always stay with me," she went on, more thoughtfully, "there is a home here for her, but you shall not stay one day."

"Where I go my wife shall go," he said, savagely, gloating over her. "If I go to a beggar's padding ken, a thieves' hiding-place, or to a felon's prison she shall go too. Whatever I suffer she shall suffer doubly, ay, trebly. I can wring your heart through her, you selfish old cat."

"You over-estimate the power that the law gives you," she said, calmly, restraining her agitation with an effort. "Myra is not obliged to live with you unless you can provide her with the necessaries of life, and you have known all along that she does not love you."

"No," he replied, with a brutal laugh, "if she loved me I might leave her to live in ease and comfort, but as it is I will wring her heart and yours before I have done with both of you," and he moved towards the door.

"Stop," said Miss Muswell, anxiously, "on what terms will you go away and never claim her as your wife?"

"Terms?" he repeated, coming back to the window and looking at the old woman and wondering how much she really did possess, and whether, as report said, she was very rich, or but a very little way removed from being poor.

"Yes," she said, "what terms will you take to annul this morning's work?"

"What do you offer?" he asked.

"I cannot both buy and sell," she replied, disdainfully.

"I will take five thousand pounds down," he said, at length, "and five thousand more at the end of twelve months if I do not claim her."

"I should think you would," was the cool reply, "but you will never get such a sum from me; I am not going to impoverish myself to enrich you."

"Then you have so much money?" he asked, insinuatingly.

"Yes, I have," was the reply.

"What an idiot I was not to marry you instead of that pale-faced girl," he exclaimed, passionately. "But there, I've always done the worst for myself all my life through."

Then without another word he rushed out of the room and ascended the staircase.

Miss Muswell did not follow him. She sat still, holding her breath, expecting every moment to hear her niece's voice crying, perhaps, for help.

But no such sound came. The girl's room was directly above the one in which she herself was sitting.

It was not easy to hear sounds in this house unless the doors of the rooms were open, for the walls and floors and ceilings were very thick, but Miss Muswell did hear a noise in the room above, and she was sufficiently alarmed to go into the kitchen and look for Jezebel.

The old woman was there, pacing about the small room in a restless, aimless manner that at once struck her mistress as peculiar.

But Miss Muswell herself was much too excited to notice excitement in others, and she said, eagerly:

"Jezebel, go and see if you can find a policeman, I am afraid that man will murder some of us. He has gone up to poor Myra. Hark, what is he saying?"

But Jezebel did not wait to hear, for without another word she rushed out of the house.

"Myra, Myra, Myra, I say!" shouted the

voice of Mr. Jarrett down the stairs. "By Heaven, it will be the worse for you if you don't come!" he added, in a lower tone.

As no response came to his call he descended the stairs and demanded with an oath where Miss Muswell had hidden the girl.

"I have not hidden her. Isn't she upstairs?" asked the old lady, now thoroughly alarmed.

And she attempted to pass, but he pushed her aside brutally, and she fell down, striking her head against the side of a door.

She was very much hurt, but she staggered to her feet and crawled upstairs to the girl's room.

It was empty. The wedding finery lay upon the bed in a tumbled heap. Drawers and wardrobe were open, the whole room was in disorder and bore traces of a hurried flight.

Myra was gone. "What a mistake!" sobbed the old woman, as she sank upon a chair. "If she had gone yesterday it would have saved her, but to-day she is his wife, a monster's wife. Better for her, poor child, if she were dead."

CHAPTER III.

FOR DAILY BREAD.

SITTING at her open window, her hands clasped, her eyes gazing despairingly on vacancy, a mad resolve in her heart to do something, to fly somewhere, but with no fixed plan in her head as to what that something was, or where that place should be, Myra heard some of the conversation which came to her through the open window of the room below.

The embrace which her husband had bestowed upon her had startled her to the consciousness of all that her act that morning must entail, and she had torn herself away and had locked herself in her room resolved to die rather than to complete her sacrifice.

It was a mad thing to do, that going to church and entering into a life-long contract without giving a thought to the certain consequences, but Myra had made this terrible mistake and now she must suffer for it.

Her wedding dress is torn off, and she puts on a plain black silk.

This she covers with a long waterproof cape, and then it occurs to her that it may be desirable to provide herself with at least one change of linen.

While she is thus preparing for flight there is a tap at the door, and a voice sounding through the keyhole says:

"Open the door, Miss Myra—it's Jezebel. I've something to tell you."

Myra unlocked the door and the woman came in, securing the bolt after her.

"You're going away?" she asked, with a glance round the room.

"Yes. Don't try to dissuade me. I ought to have gone before."

"I ain't going to, and I wish you had. Shall I go with you?" asked the old creature, timidly.

"I ain't worth much, but I'd be company like."

"No, you must stay and take care of my aunt. I have no time to lose; you must let me slip out by the back door."

"That I will. What money have you got, miss?"

"Not much; a few pounds my aunt gave me," was the reply; "but I must work and earn more before that is spent."

"Wait a minute," said Jezebel, and she ran out of the room, returning a few seconds later with a small purse, which she bade the girl hide in her bosom.

Myra objected, but Jezebel silenced her by saying:

"You haven't a moment to lose; don't you hear 'em? He'll be here directly. I know he will. Get down to the boats as quick as you can. Go to London. Come half way back if you like, but hide yourself, only you'll send to me, won't you?"

"I will—I promise. Good bye, you dear old thing."

And Myra hugged and kissed the old woman who had been a nurse and a friend to her. Then she stole softly downstairs, out by the back door and then off with all possible speed to the steam-boat pier that was not a couple of hundred yards distant.

Not a moment too soon had she left the house. She just caught a boat, and she must have been passing opposite her aunt's cottage when Mr. Jarrett broke into the deserted bed-room.

Of this, of course, Myra knew nothing, and she was carried down the river, the one glad thought in her heart being that she was free.

Past piers and bridges, past palaces and warehouses, until she reaches St. Paul's Pier, and there she leaves the boat and takes another which carries her over to the Surrey side of London Bridge.

Remembering Jezebel's instructions she walks over the bridge, and, keeping in a line with the river, she retraces her course, going westward until she reaches Blackfriars Bridge, and so gets on to the Embankment.

She walks on for a short distance, but she is getting tired and not a little bewildered, and feeling that by this time she must have distanced her possible pursuers, she sits down upon one of the seats and tries to realise the fact that she is alone in the world and that henceforth she must take care of herself.

"The first thing I must get is a lodging," she thought. "I wonder where I can go?"

She was still wondering this when a policeman who had eyed her curiously more than once passed on his beat, and she rose to her feet and accosted him.

"If you please, can you tell me where I can get lodgings?" she asked, looking up to his good-tempered countenance.

"What kind of lodgings?" he asked, civilly.

"A clean and respectable room, and not very dear," was the reply. "I only want one room. I cannot afford more."

"Well, my wife has got a room to let," he began, slowly.

"Oh, has she? How lucky I spoke to you. Your wife is sure to be respectable. Where do you live, please? I suppose you can't go with me to show me the house?"

The guardian of the peace shook his head and remarked that he was only just come on duty, but as he spoke he caught sight of a little boy, whom he called, and he placed the girl in the youngster's care, charging him to take her by a certain route to Barker's Buildings, Clerkenwell.

It was a good step for Myra, tired as she already was, but the small boy amused her by his shrewd prattle as he led her along, and they paused at length before a small tumble-down house in one of the windows of which was a card bearing upon it the word "Lodgings."

What a contrast there was between this dirty-looking house in a noisy, dirty-looking street and the pretty cottage, extensive garden, and calm repose of her old home in Chelsea.

So the girl thought, and then she muttered, bitterly:

"My home! I have no home."

Then with the courage that comes of desperation she walked in, inquired for the policeman's wife, and told her what she had come for.

"Yes, I've a room to let," replied the woman, eyeing her critically. "But I don't suppose it will suit you; 'tisn't fit for fine ladies."

"But I am not a fine lady," replied Myra, with a weary smile. "I shall have to work very hard for my living and I want a quiet room with kind, respectable people. I have money to pay for all I want till I get work," she added, misreading the expression on the woman's face.

"Well, you can look at the room if you like," replied the woman, reluctantly. "But I don't suppose 'twill suit you."

And she led the way upstairs, right to the top of the house to a large, back attic which had the solitary advantage of being light and airy, with a broad ledge of leads before the wide window upon which stood a box of mignonette and several pots of bright, though cheap plants.

Under any other circumstances the room would not have suited Myra, but here she felt

she would be safe, and she quickly came to terms with her still suspicious hostess.

The woman had a little more faith in her, however, when the weary girl asked if she would get her a chop and a cup of tea and gave her a sovereign wherewith to purchase them.

Indeed such a change did Mrs. Bunn's opinion undergo by the next morning that when she came to clear away the girl's breakfast things she remarked, kindly:

"Didn't you say you wanted to get some work, miss?"

"Yes," replied Myra, eagerly. "Can you tell me of any?"

"That depends on what you can do," was the cautious reply.

"I can sew very well," replied the girl. "And I can work a sewing machine, and I can cut out jackets, and I'm rather clever in dress-making, though I never exactly learnt it. See, I made this dress myself," she added, standing up to exhibit the fit and style of her solitary gown.

"Very nicely it's done, miss, but if you'll take my advice you'll get something cheaper and commoner for this kind of life, that silk of yours will soon wear out. I s'pose the fact is you've run away from your friends."

"Yes, I have," replied Myra, flushing painfully.

"Don't you think it's cruel to do so, miss? Your father and mother may break their hearts about you."

"You are mistaken, Mrs. Bunn," was the earnest reply. "I have neither father, mother, brother nor sister; perhaps I will tell you my story one day, but now I must live, and I won't go back to my aunt, at least at present."

"Your aunt," thought the woman; then she added, mentally, "I don't think much of aunts."

Aloud she said:

"Well, miss, you know your own business best, of course. What I was going to say is that a sister of mine has got a costume business and she keeps dozens of hands at work, she supplies some big warehouses in the City, and she'd give you plenty of work I don't doubt."

"I shall be very glad indeed to get it," replied Myra, gratefully.

"You won't make much at first," continued the policeman's wife. "But if you're clever in cutting out and that kind of thing I daresay you'd one day get to be forewoman. She often wants somebody to keep her books and write out her bills. Can you do that?"

"Oh, yes, I am very good at figures," was the reply, and then it was arranged that Mrs. Bunn should see her sister and report to our heroine the result.

It was in consequence of this conversation that a week later Myra, attired in a plain blue serge dress which she had made in the interval, presented herself at the side door of a house in Newgate Street.

She was told to go upstairs, and having reached the third floor she was taken into a room where some dozen sewing machines were drowning with their own noise all other sounds.

Here she was left with an unoccupied machine and a bundle of unstitched skirts to see what she could do with them. This was Myra's week of probation, for which she was to be paid nothing, but was to show Mrs. Money what she was worth.

It is needless for us to follow our small heroine through this week of drudgery. She was naturally industrious, otherwise her task would have seemed harder than it really was, for she had never been obliged to work, still less had she ever been tied to time.

But work kept her from thinking of the fearful mistake she had made and of the way in which she had spoilt her life, and she threw herself into her daily occupation eagerly.

By the end of the week she had gone through all the general routine of the business, and had given such satisfaction that Mrs. Money made her manager of one department and appointed her as bookkeeper, at a salary of eighteen shillings a week. Not a large sum but still quite enough for the girl's simple wants.

I had forgotten to say that Myra had left her

wedding ring behind her. It was the outward symbol of the fetters which she had been mad enough to take upon herself, and no one with whom she came in contact ever supposed that the gentle, timid girl was married.

Mrs. Bunn, who was given to the study of romance, imagined many things about her interesting lodger. She thought she had escaped from some unbearable tyranny, or had run away from an unwelcome lover perhaps, but her wildest flight of fancy never pictured Miss Martin—as she chose to call herself—as married.

So days and weeks and months rolled on, autumn and winter passed by, spring came to gladden the earth, and still Myra worked on for Mrs. Money.

But during these months Mrs. Money's health had somewhat declined. She had left more and more of her business to the care of the clever girl whom she had soon appointed to be her forewoman, and at length it became not only Myra's duty to keep the books and conduct the business correspondence, but to go to the warehouses for orders and for the weekly or monthly cheque.

It was rather a responsible post in which to place a girl without references or any known friends, but Mrs. Money was a woman who believed in her own judgment. She was satisfied of the honour and integrity of her assistant, and very soon the people at the warehouses preferred Myra's visits to those of her mistress, for when the former came there was never any blunder.

Myra's very pretty face might have had something to do with this, but she was quite unconscious of her own beauty. In very truth she never looked at a man if she could help it. She had always the terror upon her of meeting her husband face to face, and in practice if not in theory she was like the ostrich, which, when it hides its head in the sand from the hunters, forgets that its body still remains visible, and thus on the same principle Myra thought if she did not look at a man no man would look at her.

But for this absurd idea she would have observed on more than one occasion, when she went to the counting-house of a certain warehouse to receive a cheque for Mrs. Money, that a young man of very prepossessing appearance took special notice of her.

He was not one of the clerks, or the cut of his clothes would have been different. Neither had he any pressing business transactions with the cashier or with the head of the firm or he would not have loitered about or lolled in the solitary arm chair with the calm confidence that he usually exhibited.

Of course Myra was conscious that some human being was in this particular spot, and had she been questioned on the subject she would have admitted that she thought it was a man, but true to her principle she never voluntarily glanced at him.

Now this behaviour piqued the young man in question. He knew—as what young man who is good-looking does not?—that he was a pleasant subject for contemplation and that this was the opinion of many of the fairer sex, therefore it was particularly exasperating that this meek, gentle-looking little girl should never give him the opportunity he sought of looking into her deep blue eyes.

The worst of it all was that Mr. Edgar Freeman was under a sort of promise to his father not only that he would not interfere with the business, which he never meant to conduct, but that he would not talk in his light, rattling style to the people whom he might meet in the City warehouse.

For young Edgar Freeman was in the army and he had nothing to do with the business except to draw a handsome annual allowance from it.

It was the fact of his having exceeded this income that had brought him down here so much of late.

Myra's blindness piqued him.

He managed to ascertain her days for coming to the warehouse, and afterwards, by some odd

coincidence, he generally happened to be there at the same time.

But all to no purpose. He might have been a stock or a stone, or one of the dummies in the show room, for all the notice she vouchsafed him.

This was so provoking that, contrary to his agreement with his father, he one day ran after her with a glove which she had left behind.

She took the glove, looked at him, and thanked him, and from the moment when their eyes met the fate of each was sealed.

What Edgar said to Myra as they walked together through the crowded streets she did not know, and he could not remember.

It was the first throb of passionate love that her troubled heart had ever felt, it set all her pulses beating and seemed to make her brain on fire.

She only answered his questions mechanically, but her words sounded like music in his ears, and he walked with her to Mrs. Money's door, then lifted his hat with studied politeness, and went away.

But this was not their last meeting, and poor Myra before the summer came learnt the full meaning of the word "love."

CHAPTER IV.

DARKNESS AND DAWN.

"It cannot be, it can never be!"

The voice is Myra's, Edgar Freeman has just asked her to be his wife, and the conversation takes place in Mrs. Bunn's best parlour, where Myra always sees her visitors.

"But why cannot it be?" demands the young man, eagerly. "You love me, you admit that you love me."

"Yes, but I ought not to love you," sobbed the girl. "It is a crime to do so. I—I am—"

"Tell me! I have a right to know."

"I am married," said Myra, slowly and distinctly.

The next instant her wild shriek for aid rang through the house.

The young man on hearing the words had fallen as though he had been shot, and in answer to Myra's cries the policeman and his wife came rushing in to see what was the matter.

"I have killed him, I have killed him," shrieked Myra. "Let me go, let me go. He must never see me again, never. Oh, pray let me go."

But Police-Constable Bunn had had too much experience with real criminals to let her go thus easily, and he held her firmly while his wife threw water upon the face of the prostrate man, and loosened his collar.

"He's only fainted," said Mrs. Bunn, cheerily. "Help me to lift him on the sofa, Jack."

But her husband shook his head as he still held Myra, and demanded, sternly, of her:

"What did you go for to say as you'd killed him for?"

"I was afraid that I had," sobbed Myra. "But I couldn't help it."

"How couldn't you help it?" continued Bunn, sternly. "Now let us have it all out. I don't believe in mysteries, I've suspected something a long time about you, miss."

"About me?" echoed Myra, a new terror gaining hold of her.

"Yes, about you, Miss—Martin."

The last word was uttered with such peculiar emphasis that Myra felt sure that her true name was known.

"The truth is," she faltered, covering her face with her hands. "I am married, and I ran away on the wedding morning."

By this time Edgar Freeman had sufficiently recovered to be helped to a seat on the couch by Mrs. Bunn.

"Yes, and you was married at Chelsea to a man called Jabez Jarrett," said Mr. Bunn, with something like a chuckle.

"How do you know his name?" cried Myra, clasping her hands. "Oh, I am lost. I am lost!"

"I'd cheer up if I was you, miss," said Mr. Bunn, his own face beaming with satisfaction. "I know more than I have told you yet."

"Don't keep me in suspense, tell me for Heaven's sake," entreated Myra.

"Well then, miss, it's just this," said John Bunn. "If you want to see Mr. Jabez Jarrett you will find him in the House of Detention close by here. He is there waiting his trial for bigamy."

"For bigamy! for marrying me?" asked the girl, breathlessly.

"No, you'd be trigamy, miss, that's what you'd be, if there is such a word. He had two wives when he married you, so you needn't trouble your head about him."

"Oh, can it be true? Am I really free from the monster?" asked Myra, in a tremulous tone.

"Here's the newspaper, miss, perhaps you and the gentleman would like to see it," replied Bunn, drawing a soiled paper from his pocket, "and there's something in the agony column as is meant for you, miss, I fancy. And now, wife, you and me will go and get the tea."

This was said with an encouraging nod and wink to Edgar, as though to assure him that he had nothing to do but go in and win.

The policeman's story was true. Mr. Jabez Jarrett had been committed for trial on a charge of bigamy.

Whether he was found guilty or not there could be no question about Myra's freedom, for two wives already claimed him, and the report said that there were others who did not care to come forward.

It is useless to try to describe Myra's deep thankfulness at her own escape from the clutches of such a scoundrel.

When she was a little calmer and Edgar Freeman had received the assurance from her own sweet lips that she loved him and hoped for no greater happiness than to be his wife, they suddenly bethought them of the "agony column."

Yes, there was a pathetic appeal from Miss Muswell begging her niece to return to her, assuring her of being well protected, and adding that Jezebel was disconsolate.

"Is Jezebel a cat?" asked Edgar, looking mischievous.

"No, it is our old servant who helped me to run away," was the reply. "I wrote to tell her I was safe, but of course I didn't let her know where I had hidden myself."

"Well, don't you think it will be the kindest thing for us to take a nansom and drive to Chelsea at once and relieve the minds of the poor old women?"

"Yes," she assented, "if you think I am safe from that man."

"Safe enough," laughed the lover. "I'll go to the prison and see him if you like; but he dare not come near you if he were at large, and surely you can trust yourself with me."

Myra's reply was satisfactory, and a couple of hours later Miss Muswell's cottage was the scene of a happy and somewhat noisy meeting, for Jezebel was not to be kept within anything like reasonable bounds.

She embraced Myra, she embraced Edgar, she embraced her mistress, and finally she fell to hugging herself.

Then their respective stories were told, and Miss Muswell described how the ruffian, when he found Myra had escaped from him, had tried to rob the house of all that was valuable.

The arrival of the policeman whom Jezebel had fetched put an end to this proceeding, but the baffled ruffian succeeded in making his escape. There was, however, a warrant out against him, as he had learnt that very morning, his object in marrying Myra being to obtain funds with which to leave the country. But explanations, like all other things, must have an end.

Edgar Freeman told his story, and Miss Muswell smiled when he declared that no opposition on the part of his father would prevent his making Myra his wife.

But old Mr. Freeman was wise in his genera-

tion, and he smiled upon the youthful pair. It is true that his own lawyer happened to have the management of Miss Muswell's affairs, and the old gentleman ascertained that if Edgar was not marrying money, he was marrying where money was.

So he and his wife and daughters went to call upon the bride-elect and her eccentric relative, and before the summer flowers faded Myra became the happy, blushing bride of Edgar Freeman.

Her first marriage had been a terrible mistake, but she has no doubt as to the wisdom of her second.

"Good has come out of evil," she murmurs, as she buries her happy face upon her husband's breast. "If I had not made that terrible mistake, darling, I should never have known you."

He presses her to his heart. Without Myra's love life would indeed be worthless.

NOBLE AT LAST;

OR,

THE HEADSMAN OF ROUEN.

(AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE.)

CHAPTER VI.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

THE visits of Mademoiselle de Montfort to the Good Father of the Black Grotto had excited no suspicion of her real motives in making them, the guard of retainers that had latterly accompanied her to the entrance of the hermit's glen having merely been an extra precaution on the part of her father against any chance risk of her being carried off, or attempting her own escape from the compulsory wedding which was known to be so distasteful to her.

Upon her return to the chateau from this last visit she found that the Baron de Coucy had already arrived.

The preparations for the wedding had been going on for a number of days, and there was now additional bustle incidental upon the reception of the aged bridegroom, who was accompanied by a smaller and selecter train than on the occasion of his previous visit.

He was, however, said to have brought with him an immense sum of money, from the sale of one of his minor estates which had been effected at Paris; and, among the simple inhabitants at the castle, this circumstance was an effectual make-weight against the comparative deficiency of his personal following.

Dreading even one more meeting with the baron, Gabrielle at once sought her chamber by a private door and staircase, and prevailed upon her maid and nurse to make her excuses from attending the feast of that evening under pretence of nervous disorder.

Her request was acceded to, at the request of the prospective bridegroom himself, who was indulgent enough to ascribe her indisposition to an excess of maidenly coyness and reserve which he could not but approve for the time being.

So Gabrielle had her will for once at least. She took her supper alone, and then retired early, Celestine, who occupied an adjoining room, promising to arouse her at midnight for the contemplated flight.

In the mysterious hush of that lonely hour Celestine duly entered the demoiselle's chamber and was surprised to find it empty.

The bed and room had the appearance of having been vacated but a few moments before, and, not doubting that the absence was only temporary, though unaccountably ill at ease, the nurse completed her own preparations, and sat down to await her young mistress's return.

In the meantime Gabrielle, more disturbed in her rest than she had hoped for, had arisen and

dressed herself shortly before the entrance of her nurse.

She then went to the place where she was accustomed to keep her dead mother's jewels, which were her own private property, and which she had determined to take with her in her flight, as the only dowry which she could be able to bring to her lover.

To her astonishment and grief they had disappeared. The receptacle in which they had been jealously kept, but which she had not inspected for several days, was vacant.

A hasty search of every other drawer, box, shelf, or cranny wherein she might have placed them by accident or carelessness failed to bring them to light.

They were gone!

Then her astonishment changed to natural and pardonable resentment as she divined, which she speedily did, that her avaricious sire had secretly abstracted them, and concealed them in his own room, either with the intention of including their valuation in the marriage settlement that he had agreed to make upon her, or of dispossessing her of the gems altogether.

The conduct of the Count de Montfort toward his daughter had never been such as to foster either her love or her gratitude. Now her only sentiments for him were those of contempt and anger.

The proud and stubborn spirit which she had inherited from him, in default of the darker and more ignoble qualities that had failed in the transmission, was doubly supported by a sense of outrage and indignant shame.

"What is my own is mine, and I will not be defrauded of it!" she muttered, resolutely; and—just a moment before Celestine entered her room to find it deserted—she passed out of the door, swiftly but noiselessly threading the outer corridor toward her father's chamber.

That chamber opened on the corridor midway between her own door, which was at the rear extremity, and the door of the state bed-chamber, or chief guest's room, at the corridor's other end, in which the Baron de Coucy had been accommodated. Gabrielle perceived that her father's room door was ajar, which emitted a ray of light.

She stealthily peered into the room. A taper was burning upon the massive table that stood in the centre; but the curtains of the couch on the opposite side of the room were closely drawn, as though veiling the slumber of the usual occupant. Not a sound was to be heard but a faint, dripping noise as of trickling water in a corner between the foot of the bed and the wall standing at right angles with the corridor, in which she knew was stationed a marble lavatoire and bath.

Ascribing this sound to the leaking of one of the vessels placed there, she cautiously entered the room, and went directly toward the table, in one of whose drawers she felt certain she would find her missing jewels. Upon nearing it and the light, however, she started back, barely repressing an exclamation of astonishment.

The top of the table was covered with bags of money, two or three of which had burst open, to the revelation of their glittering golden contents.

At a loss to account for the presence of this great treasure—a greater, than her father had ever possessed before—and also experiencing a thrill of nameless, ill-defined fear, Gabrielle stooped, and, opening the drawers beneath one by one, for they were not locked, swiftly and silently examined their scanty contents, but without finding the object of her search.

She stopped, listened and reflected. Not a sound but the faint trickling in the lavatoire; not even a sleeper's breathing.

Renewed resentment took the place of fear and indecision. Her father had feloniously deprived her of her own property, why should she not repay herself from this heap of royal treasure, whose very existence he had meanly kept her in ignorance of, while everlastingly enjoining upon her the strictest and most humiliating economy and impressing her with a fictitious impoverishment of his resources?

Besides, deprived of her jewels, would she not be burdened by shame in seeking the arms of her betrothed without a son?

The thought was maddening; her indecision lasted but an instant.

She hastily snatched one of the bags of gold and was hurrying out of the room to rejoin Celestine and hasten her flight. The sound of something falling from the table to the floor caused her to turn. A dagger had lain on the edge of the table in the shadow of the treasure heap, and in seizing the topmost sack she had caused it to fall.

Obedient to a fatal but ungovernable impulse she picked it up with her disengaged hand and held it to the light. Both blade and hilt were covered with fresh, warm blood; the dagger had evidently wrought a murder but a few moments before.

She was horrified, appalled! The dagger seemed to cling to her fingers, she could not let it fall, but could only hold it aloft, gazing at it with starting eyeballs, while clutching the bag of gold with the other hand as if petrified.

A muttered curse—a curse as if ground and gnashed out through a fiend's set teeth—aroused her to the consciousness of a nearer and deadlier fear than the nameless one that had begun to freeze her heart.

She turned her eyes toward the lavatoire whence the sound had proceeded.

They met her father's, which glared at her with a sullen, baffled, cunning hate. The trickling sound of water was explained. He was but half dressed, and was bending over a marble basin in the shadow, stealthily cleansing the ruddy marks of assassination from his ensanguined hands.

She saw it all with electric rapidity and clearness. Her own father, the Count de Montfort, had murdered his sleeping guest, the Baron de Coney, for his treasure!

They remained regarding each other, speechless and motionless, for some moments; the daughter with wide-staring, horrified, accusing eyes, the sire with a glance in which resentment at detection, fear of betrayal, and a sudden hope of fixing the responsibility elsewhere, were struggling for dominant expression.

The spell that bound them both was suddenly broken by a loud cry of horror from the guest's room—probably that of a valet who had just discovered the murder of his master. It was echoed by another and yet another—it was taken up by other voices. In an incredibly brief space of time the cry of "Murder! Murder!" went ringing through the chateau, and the long corridor began to echo with hurrying footsteps.

Suddenly realising the position in which she found herself, but still unconsciously holding both the money and the weapon, Gabrielle started at the same time to flee and to brand the assassin with his crime.

But the Count de Montfort forestalled her both in voice and wit.

"Seize her! Seize the murderess!" he shouted, in a terrible voice, and following her as she bounded out of the room and into the corridor, where she fell half fainting into the arms of the horrified servants and retainers, who were filling the passage from both sides. "Merciful Heaven! what do I see? Gabrielle—my own child—stained with blood and burdened with stolen treasure? Ha, it blasts my eyes! What! is the poor baron murdered, then? Has her hatred of an aged bridegroom prompted her to murder?"

"Liar and fiend!" shrieked Gabrielle, furious as well as appalled at the iniquity of these charges, the sudden development of so fiendish a plot. "I found him in his room washing his blood-stained hands. The treasure is heaped on his table. He would fasten his crime upon me—his own daughter!"

"Gag her—let me not hear her voice!" exclaimed the count, hiding his eyes with one hand and waving the other with sad deprecation. "She raves! I awoke to behold her piling my table with the treasure, and still holding my bloody dagger, which even now she claps! Revenge, not plunder, was her motive.

But, oh! to think that she would try to shift her guilt upon me—her own father—the author of her being! It is too—too horrible."

Gabrielle now for the first time was conscious of carrying the money and the dagger in her hands.

She cast them from her with a loathsome gesture, and began a rapid, half-intelligible account of what had happened; but she suddenly paused, overcome with horror and despair at perceiving that none of those crowding around her believed what she said.

She looked appealingly at the old nurse, who had also joined the throng. Alas! Celestine's face, through all its horrified lineaments, seemed to wear a stern, accusing look.

Then, with a great, despairing cry, the unhappy Gabrielle fell insensible to the floor.

"Bear her to her own room and have her closely guarded," said her father, apparently awaking to a stern sense of duty by a great effort. "Miserable creature! the law must take its course. A murderess can claim no sympathy at my hands; her crime must sever even ties of race and blood. But stay, some of you," he added, turning with a hypocritical start of eagerness. "Haste to the baron's chamber; he may be but wounded."

"Nay, my lord count," exclaimed one of the servants; "the stab was to the heart—the Baron de Coney is no more!"

Apparently overcome with grief, the count again buried his face in his hands and hurried into his own room, followed by several of the servants, while the rest conveyed the insensible demoiselle to her chamber.

Celestine, who had witnessed everything like one in a nightmare, saw them place her young mistress in charge of her maid and then stole down the private stair and out of the private door into the open air.

Then still as one in a dream she got out of the grounds and sped along the gloomy paths and lanes toward the hermit's glen. She stumbled over stones and bushes, but kept on her way.

A light was gleaming from the Black Grotto as she approached it.

Jacques was standing at the door of the cave in charge of three horses. He shrank back aghast at the frightful appearance presented by the old woman as she sped by him.

Bertrand was inside the grotto in company with the good father, impatient at the unexpected delay, but still hopeful.

"Ha! here they are at last!" he cried, flinging wide the door at the sound of hurrying steps without.

But both he and the hermit fell back in amazement at the apparition bounding in alone before them with her white face, dishevelled hair and staring eyes.

"Speak!" cried the vicar; "Gabrielle—your mistress—why comes she not?"

"Woe is me! She'll come no more—there's murder at the castle—nothing but horror, horror!" was all that the horrified woman could ejaculate at first.

"Murder? Is Gabrielle murdered?" exclaimed Bertrand.

"Nay, my lord!" cried Celestine, speaking in a calmer but most hollow voice. "The Baron de Coney has been murdered, and—and—"

Her voice seemed to choke; her listeners seized her arms and fairly shook her.

"And Mademoiselle de Montfort is the murderess!" added the old nurse, finishing her information with a long wail.

"Impossible!" cried the hermit.

Bertrand fixed a glaring, unreal look upon the woman's face.

"It is a dreary jest, Celestine," he faltered.

The old woman threw herself upon a bench and began to rock her body to and fro, at the same time reciting in half-intelligible terms what had happened.

"Horrible conspiracy!" cried Bertrand, wildly.

"Speak, Celestine—you, you at least do not believe in her guilt?"

"I do—I must!" was the dreary, despairing answer.

Bertrand staggered as if under a blow, and then with a loud cry he fainted away.

(To be Continued.)

THE GROANING TREE.

THE history of the Groaning Tree is this. About forty years ago, a cottager, who lived near the centre of the village of Badesley, near Lymington, heard frequently a strange noise behind his house, like that of a person in extreme agony. Soon after it caught the attention of his wife, who was then confined to her bed. She was a timorous woman, and, being greatly alarmed, her husband endeavoured to persuade her that the noise she heard was only the bellowing of the stags in the forest. By degrees, however, the neighbours on all sides heard it, and the thing began to be much talked of.

It was by this time plainly discovered that the groaning noise proceeded from an elm, which grew at the end of the garden. It was a young, vigorous tree, and to all appearance perfectly sound.

In a few weeks the fame of the Groaning Tree was spread far and wide, and people from all parts flocked to hear it. Among others it attracted the curiosity of the late Prince and Princess of Wales, who resided at that time, for the advantage of a sea bath, at Pilewell, the seat of Sir James Worsley, which stood within a quarter of a mile of the Groaning Tree.

Though the country people assigned many superstitious causes for this strange phenomenon, the naturalist could assign no physical one that was in any degree satisfactory. Some thought it was owing to the twisting and friction of the roots. Others thought it proceeded from water which had collected in the body of the tree, or perhaps from pent air. But no cause that was alleged appeared equal to the effect. In the meantime the tree did not always groan, sometimes disappointing its visitants; yet no cause could be assigned for its temporary cessations, either from seasons or weather. If any difference was observed, it was thought to groan least when the weather was wet, and most when it was clear and frosty; but the sound, at all times, seemed to arise from the root.

Thus the Groaning Tree continued an object of astonishment during the space of eighteen or twenty months to all the country around; and, for the information of distant parts, a pamphlet was drawn up, containing a particular account of all the circumstances relating to it. At length the owner of it, a gentleman of the name of Forbes, making too rash an experiment to discover the cause, bored a hole in its trunk. After this it never groaned. It was then rooted up with a further view to make a discovery; but still nothing appeared which led to any explanation of the cause. It was universally, however, believed that there was no trick in the affair, but that some natural cause really existed, though never understood.

WOUND no one's feelings unnecessarily; there are thorns enough in the path of human life.

THERE is a chance at last of England and Ireland being united. A chart has just been issued showing a plan to unite Great Britain and Ireland by means of a solid embankment, about 100 yards wide at the top, and of equal depth from the bottom of the sea to the surface level. The length of the embankment would be about twenty miles, and points from which the works start on either side would be the Mull of Cantire and Tor Point, in the county of Antrim. The originator of the scheme is a Mr. J. C. King, of London. It is asserted that in changing the course of the tides and diverting the various currents, large tracts of moist land on both coasts would be made available for cultivation.



[THE DENIAL.]

A MESMERIC EXPERIMENT.

THIRTY Christmas nights have come and gone since that one, so memorable in my life, and yet, sitting here in my solitary room a grey-haired, lonely woman, the whole scene rises as vividly before me as though it had occurred but yesterday.

I can see the comfortably but plainly furnished, low-ceiled, old-fashioned room with its dark wainscoted walls and its dim corners that the feeble light of a couple of composite candles could scarcely reach. I can see the half-circle of faces gathered round the hearth, looking glowing and pleasant in the ruddy glare of the firelight—all except one, that of a man who sat in the corner opposite me.

I could not keep my eyes off that face, which had for me the fascination of ugliness. As the lights and shadows made by the flickering flame touched the shock of bristly hair that half concealed the low, narrow forehead, the cavernous eyes, sunken cheeks and huge mouth, half open with a cynical smile that showed the tusk-like teeth, I could compare it only with a shifting series of gargoyles from some old monkish ruin.

We were all members of the company of the Theatre Royal X., and it being a non-play night we were assembled at the lodgings of one of our members, a lady, to do honour to her birthday.

Our usual theme, the affairs of the theatre, past, present and future, being exhausted, the conversation, I cannot remember how, had turned upon mesmerism and clairvoyance, and I was stoutly declaring my utter disbelief in either, my scepticism being greatly intensified by the circumstance that Tony Arnold—the man I have just described and who was one of the low comedians of our company—took the opposite side.

There had always been an antagonism between us, and, although I had no actual cause for such a feeling, a positive dislike upon my part, which I believe was pretty strongly reciprocated upon his.

Although I was scarcely twenty at the time, I was what people would have called a strong-minded girl, with opinions of my own that I never shrank from asserting, with an obstinacy that no argument could overcome, and on that night, excited by a spirit of defiance to my vis-à-vis, I expressed them with a bigotry and contempt that were anything but polite to those who differed from me.

"By your positiveness, Miss Grace," sneered Arnold, "I presume you have had a very large experience of the trickeries of mesmerists."

"Oh, indeed, I have not," I replied, sharply. "I was never at any exhibition of the kind in my life, and never intend to be. I should not have patience even to witness such a transparent imposture."

"Suppose," he said, and there was a gleam in his eyes which indicated rising temper—

"suppose I could give you ocular demonstration that you are wrong by placing someone in this room under mesmeric influence; I have done the thing often. If I did this before your own eyes, when you would be quite assured there could not be trick or collusion, would you believe it then?"

"I don't know that I should," I answered, doggedly. "If you have such a power," I added, with a contemptuous smile, "why don't you try it upon me?"

Arnold was evidently taken aback. I do not think he dreamed of my taking up his challenge. He regarded me for some seconds with a doubtful, wavering glance, which I met defiantly and mockingly.

"I would prefer anyone else in the room," he answered, hesitatingly.

"Of course you would," I replied, with a malicious laugh. "I am not a good subject; the mystic influence is powerless over disbelievers. Oh, I know all that jargon." And I cast a triumphant glance round the company, who were exceedingly amused at our discussion.

Arnold turned alternately white and red with rage and mortification.

"It is not that," he answered, quickly, then paused; but evidently stung by my contemptuous laugh, he added, instantly, "Very well; be it so, since you desire it."

The prospect of having the discussion so summarily tested and adjudged created an immense excitement, and I could feel my own cheeks burning and my pulse galloping at fever heat as Arnold proceeded to make preparations for the experiment.

I anticipated the usual passes and hand-wavings of which I had heard and read, but I soon perceived that his method was going to be entirely different.

He began by placing two chairs exactly opposite to one another, in one of which he requested me to be seated; then he draped a large black cloak around me, so that only my face rose above it; then a lamp, borrowed from the landlady of the house, was set in such a position that the light should focus upon my face; after which he took the chair opposite to mine, and desired me to fix my eyes firmly upon his and not remove them for a second.

I followed his instructions, and the next moment I was staring intently into a pair of greenish-brown orbs that I could feel did not meet mine with equal steadiness.

There was a profound silence, broken only by a little suppressed giggle from the females and an occasional low whisper from the men.

We had been thus only a few seconds when Arnold sprang up, exclaiming,

"It's no use; I cannot do it."

A shout of laughter hailed this confession of defeat, and, throwing off my drapery, I jumped up and joined heartily in the chorus.

Arnold was as white as death and extremely agitated. He made no reply to the volleys of "chaff" that assailed him on all sides, but again turning to me, said, in a tone of intense earnestness:

"I cannot mesmerise you, but you can me; those strong, steel-grey eyes of yours with their metallic lustre, are far more potent than mine. Come, will you try?"

I did not need the incitement of hand-clapping and the chorus of "Oh, do!" that greeted the proposition to promptly consent. I began to be deeply interested in the experiment, and now that I was myself accredited with possessing this occult power my scepticism began to waver.

"But before we go any further," he said, "I must make one condition, and that is that should I fall into a comatose state, you will not put to me any question of a private nature, as I shall be compelled to answer truthfully, literally, whatever it may be."

I promised faithfully not to do so.

The previous disposition was now reversed, the lamp was set so that the light should shine upon Arnold's face, and he was enveloped in the cloak as I had been.

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And now with all the nerve power I possessed I fastened my eyes upon Arnold's. White and ghastly looked his face rising out of the blackness of the drapery, which gave it almost the appearance of being divided from the body and suspended in space.

The lips were wide apart, and the greenish eyes were dilated to their utmost extent with a strained, fascinated look, such as they might have worn under the influence of a rattlesnake. I could scarcely suppress a shiver at this uncanny-looking picture; but a wild spirit took possession of me that night which soon swept away all such "compunctious visitings of nature."

Everybody seemed to be thoroughly impressed by the weirdness of the situation; there was no giggling, no whispering; all was silent as death.

After about a minute my eyes grew rigid in their intense stare, until it seemed to me that I no longer had the power to move or close them, or even wink a lid; gradually I could feel the pupils dilate, until they seemed to become two huge discs glowing with a lambent and metallic fire.

I could see that every nerve of the white face was quivering, the breathing was short and laboured, and a dull, stony glare came into the staring eyeballs—a far-away, trance-like look that told me consciousness was gone, and that the very soul of the man had passed over to my keeping.

And I felt a cold, cruel, hard triumph in this, a desire to strain my mastery to the utmost. I rose from my seat, slowly moved backward, and imperiously beckoned him, never relaxing my fixed stare, which seemed to scintillate and flash.

As I rose he rose, clutching the edge of the table to guide his trembling steps. Slowly I moved, he following, seemingly impelled by an involuntary but resistless impulse. I stopped suddenly; he stopped.

"What is your name?" I asked, imperatively.

In a forced, hollow voice he gave one that I afterwards discovered was his family name, Arnold being only a theatrical sobriquet.

At this one of the gentlemen broke in, protesting:

"No, no; that is against the bargain; no questions."

"It is time to put an end to it; I don't like it," said another.

"Oh, yes," added a lady; "it is too horrible."

The interruption seemed to exorcise the fiend that possessed me, and call me back to myself; with an effort I wrenched my gaze from that ghastly face. As I did so, Arnold, as though he had been only held up by my eyes, fell upon the floor in strong convulsion.

Our experiment in mesmerism spoiled the rest of the evening; for although after a copious outward application of cold water, and a judicious inward one of neat brandy, he soon recovered and tried to laugh off his illness, it left a creepy, disagreeable depression upon all, which no amount of hot spirits and water and forced jollity could succeed in dispelling.

As it may be supposed, the effect was strongest upon me, and it chiefly took the form of intense annoyance at the part I had played; I would have given anything to have recalled the past few minutes.

After Arnold's recovery, by a tacit understanding, no one made any reference to his strange illness; indeed, all seemed desirous for a time of putting it out of their thoughts, and none so much as the principal actor in it, who laughed and jested in a feverish manner, and never allowed the conversation to flag for a single moment, as though he feared the subject might crop up again.

Everybody, however, was eagerly discussing the singular event the next morning at rehearsal.

I avoided the gossiping groups, for the remembrance of the scene was a horror to me; so did Arnold, whom I studiously attempted to avoid; but he took an exactly opposite course, following me wherever I went, trying to engage

me in conversation and to catch my eye, as though some of the fascination of the previous night still surrounded me.

After a rather late dinner, for the rehearsal was very long, I was dozing in my chair, when there came a soft tap at the door, and to my sleepy "Come in" there appeared upon the threshold the tall, gaunt figure of the man whom of all others I least desired to see.

It gave me quite a shock. It was the first time he had ever called at my lodgings.

In common courtesy I was obliged to ask him to take a seat and draw near the fire, as the weather was cold.

In a vague, listless manner he placed a chair in such a position that it exactly faced mine, dropped into it without a word, and tried to fix my eyes.

I immediately shifted them and gazed into the fire.

He made no attempt to account for this visit; he talked very little, and in an absent manner—that betrayed that his thoughts were not on his tongue—about the business of the theatre. I felt very embarrassed by his presence, and presently rose and rang for tea.

What could I do but ask him to remain and take it with me? He said, "Thank you," and kept his seat.

I felt quite terrified by the change that had come over him—from a noisy, jesting, rollicking kind of fellow, who had always a gibe for me, to this silent, subdued man, with those dreadful eyes ever yearningly seeking mine.

At length he went away, and never in my life did I feel so thankful for anybody's departure.

But he came the next day about the same time and acted in just the same manner until the lights were brought in, then all at once he rose from his chair, crossed over to where I was sitting, and laying his hand upon my arm, said, in a hoarse whisper:

"Mesmerise me."

I started back, and answered, shudderingly:

"Not for worlds!"

"You must," he answered, passionately.

And somehow or other, I cannot tell how, a few minutes afterward we were sitting vis-à-vis staring into each other's eyes. In less than a minute there was in his the dull, stony vagueness of insensibility.

I covered my face with my hands, but withdrew them as I heard something fall heavily upon the floor, to see him huddled at my feet in convulsions, the froth bubbling from his lips.

I did not call for assistance, luckily I had some water and some brandy in the room. I knelt down and copiously bathed his head and face, and then with some difficulty forced a little of the spirits between his clenched teeth.

When he recovered I nearly fainted myself, but rallying by an effort I told him very positively that he must not come any more.

"I cannot stay away, I must come," was his answer. And again the dilated eyes began to wander cravingly in search of mine.

I cannot describe the horror I felt at these visits, and at length I begged a lady friend I had in the theatre to come and stay with me.

The following afternoon he strolled in as usual, but, finding I had a companion, he looked very annoyed and remained only a few minutes.

Several days passed and I met him only in business. His manner was sullen, almost rude to me, at which I was much relieved, for I now began to entertain hopes that he would persecute me no more.

The change that had come over him was a constant subject of green-room comment. He had always been extremely thin, now he seemed to waste day by day like a man consumed by an inward fire; his cheeks were sunk in deeper hollows and there were black rims round his eyes.

After a few days my friend returned to her own lodgings. The next afternoon at the usual hour Arnold came as before.

As soon as the lights were brought in he

again besought me to mesmerise him. I firmly refused; but I could not rest my eyes upon him for a moment without his face beginning to quiver and his pupils to dilate, and the very feeling that I must not look at him made the desire almost unconquerable.

Matters went on thus for upward of a week.

But surely, it will be said, you could have devised some means of keeping him away; you might have requested your landlady to refuse him admittance. Truly, I could have done so, but—well, I must confess it even in my own defence—Arnold had begun to throw a strange glamour over me; I dreaded his coming, yet I experienced a vague yearning when he was absent. I had fallen myself within the meshes of the spell I had unconsciously cast upon him.

One afternoon he arrived rather earlier than usual; there was certainly some occult sympathy between us, for the moment he entered the room I felt that a crisis had come.

He was in very weak health, and he sank down in a chair, looking pale and exhausted, and wiped the damps from his forehead, while his breathing was very laboured; and there was a feverish glitter in the restless eyes and a red spot in each hollow cheek.

"How very ill you look," I said, pityingly; "let me give you a glass of wine."

"No, I want nothing," he said, in a gasping tone; "there's quite fire enough within me now; I am being slowly burned up."

"Have you seen a doctor?" I asked, growing very nervous.

"A doctor?" he echoed, with a mocking laugh. "Oh, yes, I have seen a doctor, but he can do me no good. It is you who are killing me."

"I!" I answered, faintly.

"Yes," he answered; "since the night you tore the heart and soul out of my body I cannot live without you, and I won't."

I was very much terrified by his wild, excited looks, but replied, with a great show of firmness:

"You talk nonsense, Arnold; why, you are married already."

I did not know at the moment whether it was really so, but there was a vague impression among the company that such was the case, and it was upon that authority that I spoke.

"How did you know that—you questioned me when I was under your influence?" he retorted, sharply.

"I did not, but I find it is true. And under such circumstances, how dare you address me in such terms?" I exclaimed, growing very indignant, perhaps more in seeming than in reality.

"Yes," he replied, dejectedly, "I am married to a woman I hate, to a woman I left at the church door. I was forced into it by my friends—never mind why—that would not interest you."

He paused for a moment, then, laying his trembling fingers upon my arm, he added:

"Alice"—he had come to call me by my Christian name—"if anything were to happen to her—if she were to die—would you be my wife?"

I started away from him, exclaiming:

"Don't talk like that; it is too horrible!"

But he followed me, and again grasped my arm, and said:

"Alice, I told you just now that I cannot live without you, and that I will not, and I swear before God that if you do not give me this promise, when I leave this house I will throw myself over the bridge into the river—I swear it!"

Men—and women too—say these things in moments of strong passion, without keeping their words; but I knew that he would keep his; the mysterious sympathy that had been created between us told me so, told me that if he left me with that thought in his heart he would not be a living man within the next hour.

It was nearly dark, just between the lights, and his face gleamed out of the shadows white and terrible, and then I thought how it would look when it was drawn out of the water with the long, dank hair clinging about it.

"It is not much to ask of you," he went on, pleadingly. "Why, she may outlive us both;

more than likely; there is nothing shocking in it—she is nothing to me, never has been; only the mockery of a ceremony links us.”

“But what is the use of such a pledge? What satisfaction can it be to you?” I said, still with my face covered, for I dreaded to meet his eyes.

“I don’t know,” he answered; “it would give me a sort of hope that I can’t live without, that I won’t live without.”

Well, I gave him the promise. I daresay you will consider it was very wicked of me to do so. I think so myself. But I thought it was almost impossible that I should be ever called upon to fulfil it, and how could I hesitate when a man’s life seemed to be at stake?

The following morning, as I was seated at breakfast, I caught sight of Arnold’s dark figure passing my parlour window, and the next moment I heard his now well-known knock at the street door. I put down the cup of coffee that I had raised half-way to my lips, while an unaccountable dread stole over me.

One glance at his countenance, as he entered the room told me that something had happened. He did not look at me, not even exchange a greeting, as he laid down his hat and took a chair.

“I have strange news to tell you, Alice,” he said, in a voice thick and indistinct with agitation.

“For God’s sake, don’t tell me that—”

I could not complete the utterance of my fears; my voice died away in my throat, and with parted lips and rigid eyes I could only await the explanation.

Meantime he had taken from his breast pocket a letter, which he rose and offered me. It had a deep black border.

I shrank back; I would not touch it; I knew its contents.

“You knew what was going to happen—you have cruelly entrapped me,” I exclaimed, bitterly.

He threw himself upon his knees at my feet.

“I swear most solemnly,” he cried, “I did not. It was very sudden, the letter will tell you so; heart disease—her friends had scarcely a moment’s warning.”

There was that in his tone I could not disbelieve, and when, after a while, I brought myself to read the fatal letter I found his assertions were there fully confirmed.

“That makes it all the more horrible,” I cried, “for I now feel as though I were in some way the cause of her death.”

I implored him to release me from my promise, as nothing good could come of a marriage contracted under such auspices. But he only repeated the old words:

“I cannot live without you, and I won’t.”

My friend, who could perceive how ill-assorted we were, did all in her power to persuade me to break with him.

“Leave the company,” she said; “give no notice of your intention, and go home, or take another engagement under another name.”

But I felt that I could not break a vow so solemnly made, and which fate, whether for good or evil, had so suddenly called upon me to fulfil.

No, I am wrong; I did not love him, it was only a glamour—whether the result of supernatural influence or mere superstition I cannot pretend to say—it was a mixture of dread, repulsion and fascination.

That day two months was our wedding-day.

I had striven hard to postpone it to a much later date, but he would not give me a moment’s peace until I consented.

“She was my wife only in name,” he kept urging, “so what need is there of a delay?”

Although the strange manner of our wooing was unknown to everybody, save the friend I have before mentioned, it was impossible for the company not to see how matters stood between us.

But somehow we had drifted away from the rest, and now kept aloof from them, and only

an occasional hint or innuendo or sly look told us of their observation.

I know we were the constant theme of conversation and wonderment, but I do not think that anyone ever dreamed it would be a match.

And we were both equally desirous of keeping our approaching marriage a profound secret. My friend and one of the actors whom Arnold had almost sworn to secrecy were to be the only witnesses, so that when on that bright March morning we entered the quiet suburban church only a few strange loiterers were there. We were dressed in our ordinary costume, and no one who had met us would have suspected our purpose.

When he passed the ring over my finger his hand was like ice, so were his lips that just touched mine at the end of the ceremony, and I saw no joy in the livid face that was expressionless as though carved in stone.

We walked back from the church to my lodgings, where we were to be domiciled for the present.

He scarcely spoke the whole way. He left me at the door, saying that he was obliged to go somewhere, but that he would return in time for dinner, which was arranged for three o’clock.

I ran upstairs to my bedroom, my heart ready to burst with mortification, and had a good cry. My friend did all she could to console me and to put a cheerful face upon matters, and after a while I rallied a little, and went downstairs and sat down to the piano and played and sang to pass away the time.

Three o’clock came and past and still he did not return. Then his friend, who had remained with us, said he would go in search of him.

In about half an hour he came back bringing Arnold with him. He afterwards told me that he had found him playing cards, and recklessly treating everybody who entered the room at a tavern used by the actors. I always possessed a great deal of self-control, and I kept myself quiet tranquil.

It had been arranged that we should sup at my friend’s lodgings, and thither after the performance, for we played that night, we went. There were only four of us—the four present at the ceremony.

Arnold was dull and sullen, and at times seemed scarcely conscious of where he was, for when addressed he would start and look vacantly about him like one suddenly aroused from a doze.

It was two o’clock in the morning before we turned our faces homeward. Silently he pursued his way and I was too proud to speak.

But, oh, the agony, the shame, the humiliation I endured that night!

When we arrived at our lodgings the fire was out. It was a very chilly night, and he complained of being cold and said he should rekindle it.

While he went away seeking some wood in the kitchen I ran upstairs to my room and went to bed. At last my aching, swollen eyes closed and I fell asleep.

When I awoke the cold grey dawn of the spring morning was just stealing across the darkness of my room. I awoke with a start and sat bolt upright with a sense of ineffable horror. Had I been dreaming? I could not remember. Yet there was upon me all the terror which is left by some ghastly nightmare.

I leaped out of bed, huddled on a dressing-gown, and with bare feet hurried down the stairs.

It was an impulse, nothing more, for I had no thought in what I was doing. I opened the parlour door and looked in. All was dark and silent.

“He has gone to sleep upon the sofa,” was my reflection.

My woman’s pride prompted me to return to my chamber, but some other feeling held me rooted to the spot. The creaks of the shutters were pencilled with faint lines of light.

I crossed the room, unbarred and threw them open and looked up at the sky. The waning moon was high in the heavens, over which a faint roseate flush was just stealing and a wild

chorus of birds in the trees close by alone broke the deep stillness of the early morning.

I stood gazing upon the picture for some seconds, not because I felt its beauty but because I dared not turn my head.

When after a time I summoned up resolution to do so it was slowly and by degrees. First my eyes fell upon the sofa, that was empty; then they travelled towards the hearth.

The fire had burned into a great hellow, grey and brown within, black above. I could see only a portion of the grate, as an easy-chair was drawn in front of it.

There was something in the chair, something lolling sideways, and there was a coat-sleeve with a hand dangling across one arm.

I could feel my hair bristle up and my heart stand still as I crept up to it and saw a huddled heap of clothing in which was half-buried a livid, hair-strewn face.

It was my husband—dead!

FACETIÆ.

BY NEW YEAR’S EVE.

A GENTLEMAN of whom we hear a great deal to-day is “Tom Orrow.” Punch.

A CRY FROM THE HEART.

LITTLE DUNCE (looking up suddenly from her history book): “Oh, mummy darling, I do so wish I’d lived under James the Second.”

MAMMA: “Why?”

LITTLE DUNCE: “Because I see here that education was very much neglected in his reign!” Punch.

FRESH FROM THE CASK.

WHEN a very thirsty man requires some beer what musical instrument will he call for?—The Bass soon! Punch.

LAND MEASUREMENT.—An Irish League—Any il-league-al lengths. Punch.

M.P. FOR CHRISTMAS.—Mince-pie. Punch.

SCENE—Country Post-office.

POSTMASTER: “What’s your pleasure, ma’am?”

OLD LADY (who has but a vague idea of Mr. Fawcett’s scheme): “Just put me up six-penny-worth of Consols, please, and look here, you needn’t keep ‘em for me. I’ll take ‘em away.” Punch.

TRANSVAAL SURPRISES.—Peep-Bo-ers.

Moonshine.

A “TOUCHING” CEREMONY.—Conferring the honour of knighthood. Moonshine.

HER MAJESTY’S SERVICE.—It has been disapprovingly remarked by some that none of the members of our Royal Family are ever now permitted to be with the Army on active service. Perhaps such persons may be gratified to hear that, in consequence of the Boer rebellion, the “Queen” is going to take out the Inniskilling Dragoons to Natal. Moonshine.

SAID the suicide as he reached the bottom of the river, “I’ve settled down.” Moonshine.

SURROUNDED as we are by horrors, nobody seems to have taken notice of the fact that troops are daily being quartered in Ireland. Moonshine.

SHARP FELLOWS.—Cutlers. Moonshine.

REDDY WIT.—The hot poker business. Moonshine.

“LIGHT” SOUNDS.—Sounds of the telephone. Moonshine.

THE MARINER’S COMPASS.—Jack’s parting embrace. Moonshine.

MORTALITY RETURNS.—Ghosts. Moonshine.

FREE-HOLD GROUND.—Irish land. Moonshine.

THE INCOME “TAX.”—A family of daughters. Moonshine.

DOWN ON HER.

WHEN a man is informed that his wife wishes to speak to him what article on this study table does he mention in reply?—Letter-weight.

Fun.

THE ANGLERS' PATRON SAINT.—Polycarp.

Fun.

FILIAL AFFECTION.

SCHOOL BOARD EXAMINER (improving the occasion): "Children, love and honour your parents. Never give them pain. There are two kinds of pain—mental and physical. Now, Sally Muggins, if, on rising in the morning, you found your father ill and suffering great pain, you would be sorry, would you not?"

SALLY MUGGINS: "I ain't sorry when father 'aves the gout; I'm glad."

S. B. E.: "Glad! Why?"

S. M.: "Cos then he can't wear his boots, so I don't have to clean 'em."

Fun.

TRYING IT ON.

INDIGNANT MOTHER: "Surely you don't mean this for a likeness of my son? It's not got his nose."

PHOTOGRAPHER: "I'm very sorry, but the fact is the nose never does come out quite right with the first copy. If you took a dozen now—"

Judy.

AT THE ZOO.

SMALL BOY: "Mamma, now we've seen the lions can't we see the unicorns?"

Judy.

USEFUL WISH FOR A MUSICIAN WHO PLAYS OUT OF TUNE.—A happy new year.

Funny Folks.

SUITABLE FOR CARD-PLAYERS.—A w(h)istful expression.

Funny Folks.

"HARD LINES" FOR MANY WOMEN.—Their marriage "lines."

Funny Folks.

POSSIBLE FOR LAND SURVEYORS.

IF a "miss is as good as a mile," what is as bad as an Irish Land League? Funny Folks.

LATEST EUPHEMISM FOR A MATERNAL CANINE QUADRUPED.—A dog-ma.

Funny Folks.

THE BANK HOLIDAY-MAKER'S LOVE.—"I Lub my Lub with an L, because he is Lubbock."

Funny Folks.

A TURKISH JOKER.

THE best known story of the traditional Joe Miller of Turkey is that of his thrice fooling an assembly of true believers out of a sermon by three successive jocular replies. The first time he ascended the pulpit he said:

"Oh, true believers, do you know what I am going to say?"

They replied:

"No."

Whereupon he asked:

"Of what use is it to preach to such ignoramus?" and came down from the pulpit.

The next time, when he asked the same question, they answered:

"Yes, we know."

Whereupon he said:

"Then it is useless for me to tell you," and came down.

The third time, having taken counsel together, the congregation prepared an answer which they thought would corner their joker preacher, and said:

"Some of us know and some of us don't."

Whereupon he promptly replied:

"Let those who know tell those who don't," and once more came down.

SHARP WORK.

A GENTLEMAN lately took a bad half-sovereign. He asked sundry experts if it might possibly be good, but they were unanimous that it was not; and so he put it away in a corner of his pocket and resigned himself to the loss. But it happened that in the evening he took a cab and drove about to so many places that, feeling for change, he discovered that he had not enough to pay the fare. Forgetting all about the half-sovereign being bad, he handed it to the cabman, asked for change, which the man gave, and then

drove off hurriedly. Just then the fare remembered, and not wishing to "do" the cabby, called out:

"Here, that money is bad!"

"It's quite good enough for you!" retorted the man, turning round with a grin.

The fare looked at the half-crowns, and at once suspected that they were bad, as proved to be the case; but the long drive had been enjoyable, and on the whole the cabby hardly got the best of it.

FOR AN OLD LOVE'S SAKE.

WITH sorrowful tears fast falling,
I met by the river's flow,
Forlorn by the storm winds' calling,
The loved of the Long Ago.

She drooped in my presence, weeping,
The cup of her grief brimmed o'er,
The babe on her bosom sleeping
The traits of my rival bore.

My life's one dream she had shattered
On a never-forgotten morn—
All the hopes I had builded scattered
In pitiless, mocking scorn.

She had wedded for wealth and splendour,
In defiance of plighted faith,
And left of my vision tender
But a wan and shivering wraith.

But now as I learned her story
Of sorrow, neglect and pain,
The fount of my tears, long hoary,
Was melted to kindly rain.

"Though the tempest is gathering o'er thee,"

I murmured, "it shall not break;
As a friend and guide before thee
I will go for an old love's sake.

"My tongue shall reproach thee never;
The Past is a book that is read,
And shut up and closed for ever;
And its words shall be hence unsaid.

"Come, bring to my roof your baby,
I will garment and feed ye both,
Till the fates in their good time, may be,
Shall no longer with you be wroth.

"All this for the love once cherished,
Poor child, I would have thee know,
For the sake of the love long perished,
The love of the Long Ago." N. D. U.

STATISTICS.

STEAM ENGINES.—According to recent official statistics published by Dr. Engel, of Berlin, four-fifths of the steam-engines now working on the globe have been made within the last twenty or thirty-five years. The locomotives in the Old and the New World have exceeded the number of 105,000, running on 450,000 kilometres of railway. Their total force represents 30 million horse-power. Now it is generally considered that the horse-power is equal to the power of three living horses, and a live horse's power to that of seven strong men. Hence the steam-engines of the globe represent the power of nearly a milliard of men in working condition, which is more than double the effective force of workers corresponding to the population of the globe. The steam-engine has about tripled the power of human labour with regard to ships; their number in 1879 is estimated at about 127,000 (as against 136,000 in 1870), but

their capacity had attained 20 million tons (against 17 million in 1870), and the steamships gauging nearly 5 million tons (or double the tonnage in 1870) were in number nearly 14,000 (against 8,000).

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

BOILED APPLE PUDDING.—Make a paste with finely-chopped suet and twice the amount of flour, a pinch of salt and a little water. Roll it out thin into a large piece, put this over a well-buttered basin, and push it in so as to line the basin with it; cut it off all round so as to leave enough to fold; roll out the trimmings to such a size as to cover the top of the basin. Pare, core, and slice a quantity of good sound apples, put them in the basin in layers, scatter sugar between each, and one or two cloves, or chopped lemon-peel, or a little grated nutmeg; add a small piece of fresh butter, pack the apples tightly, put on the cover of paste, turn the edges and press them down, tie a floured pudding cloth over it, and put the basin into a saucepan of boiling water; keep it covered with water. Boil from two to three hours, according to size.

ELEPHANT ON TOAST.—Take cold meat and put it on the fire in a stewpan with a little water. When tender take it up and mince very fine; then put it back and flavour with pepper and salt. Make some toast, butter each slice, and spread the mince over each piece; then pour the gravy over it. Serve hot.

MISCELLANEOUS.

PRIDE is not a bad thing when it only urges us to hide our own hurts—not to hurt others.

A CALIFORNIA inventor has devised a process for pressing and drying potatoes so that they will keep for years without loss of flavour.

A LONDON druggist has this cheerful invitation in his shop window: "Come in and get twelve emetics for one shilling."

A CHRISTMAS novelty is a luminous bust, which absorbs the actinic rays in the daytime and emits them in the dark.

It must have been a very remarkable dinner-party on Christmas Day at 88, Berkeley Square. Lord and Lady Londesborough entertained the diminutive people now exhibiting at the Piccadilly Hall. His lordship had the furniture, dishes, and plates made specially to suit the size of his little guests. The food also corresponded, everything being of the most minute size.

A CORRESPONDENT has discovered that a transposition of the letters of the name of the leader of the Irish land agitators yields the following appropriate anagram:—"Kasual praters: the new L—L—"

MOODY and Sankey, the American Evangelists, have accepted an invitation to revisit Great Britain and Ireland upon a second campaign during 1881.

M'LE OZY, a French actress, recently received the following declaration: Mademoiselle, I am only a poor worker, but I love you like a millionaire. While waiting to become one I send you this simple bunch of violets. If my letter gives you a wish to know me, and to answer to the sentiments of my soul, when you are on the stage to-night lift up your eyes to the cock-loft, my legs will hang over.

MISS MABEL MAY, a young English lady of high character and rare accomplishments, will be the companion and assistant of Mrs. General Garfield in the White House.

THE new rules for the prevention of collisions at sea have been officially adopted by England, France, Austria, Germany, Russia, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, Greece, Denmark, Norway and Sweden, Spain, Portugal, the United States, Chili, and Japan.

CONTENTS.

Page	Page
A BURIED SIN; OR, HAUNTED LIVES ... 313	MISCELLANEOUS ... 335
A SPRIG OF MISTLETOE ... 317	CORRESPONDENCE ... 336
OUR COLUMBUS FOR THE CURIOUS ... 320	
VERA'S VENTURE ... 321	
MYRA'S MISTAKE (COMPLETE) ... 325	VERA'S VENTURE com- menced in ... 315
NOBLE AT LAST; OR, THE HEADSMAN OF ROUEN. (AN HIS- TORICAL ROMANCE) ... 330	A SPRIG OF MISTLETOE commenced in ... 320
A MEMORIC EXPERI- MENT ... 332	NOBLE AT LAST; OR, THE HEADSMAN OF ROUEN. (AN HIS- TORICAL ROMANCE) ... 323
FACTS ... 334	A BURIED SIN; OR, HAUNTED LIVES, commenced in ... 325
POETRY ... 335	
STATISTICS ... 335	
HOUSEHOLD TERA- SURES ... 335	

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

OUR CORRESPONDENTS are informed that no charge is made under any circumstances for advertisements appearing on this page.

GOLD PAINT.—Judson's gold paint will meet your inquiry in every way, as it restores faded gilt frames, or indeed any portion of woodwork which might require regilding. It is simple in its application, and you may purchase a box for 1s. 6d., 3s. 6d., or 10s. 6d., from any oilman or chemist, the same containing every item necessary for its appliance.

C. H. M.—The dietary which Mr. Banting observed to reduce his weight from 202 pounds to 150 was this: For breakfast, four ounces of beef, mutton, or any kind of broiled fish or cold meat, excepting pork, salmon, eels, and herring; a large cup of tea, without milk or sugar, a little biscuit or an ounce of dry toast. For dinner, five or six ounces of any fish or meat (except those prohibited), any vegetable (except potatoes, parsnips and beets), one ounce of dry toast, ripe and cooked fruits, any kind of poultry and game. For tea, two or three ounces of fruit, dry toast, and a cup of tea without milk or sugar. And for supper, three or four ounces of meat or fish, with a glass or two of claret or Madeira. Food which contains sugar and starch in large proportions rapidly creates fat, and must be avoided by those who have a horror of corpulency.

ARTHUR.—To ascertain the number of cubic feet in a barrel, first add together the bung and head diameters in inches, and divide by two for the mean diameter; then multiply the square of the mean diameter by the length of the cask in inches. This will give you the capacity in cubic inches, which, divided by 1,728, gives the number of cubic feet. To ascertain how many gallons a barrel will hold, multiply the number of cubic inches by .004 for wine gallons, and .0028 for beer gallons.

HELEN.—If the gentleman means anything more than friendship by his attentions, he will find an opportunity of making his intentions known to you.

INQUIRER.—Perhaps there is no better marking ink extant than that introduced by Messrs. Bainbridge and Found, wholesale druggists, of Leather Lane, Holborn; and for the marking of linen it is unequalled, as it is at once permanent and indestructible. You can procure a bottle at any chemist's.

J. B. W.—The word "limbo" means a border. It is applied to a region supposed by some of the old scholastic theologians to lie on the edge or border of Hades. Here it was thought the souls of just men not admitted into heaven, nor confined in purgatory, remained to await the general resurrection. There were several kinds of limbo. One was for the patriarchs and other pious ancients who died before the advent of the Saviour, and so could not avail themselves of His atonement. That was the "Limbo of the Fathers" which you read about. According to some of the schoolmen there was also a limbo for the souls of children that died unbaptised. The "Fool's Paradise" was a limbo which served as a receptacle of all vanity and nonsense. Milton refers to this in "Paradise Lost," and makes a fine use of the superstition.

M. H. A.—"The Man with the Iron Mask" was an unknown French prisoner, whose identity has never been satisfactorily established, although a great deal has been written on the subject. He was carried with the greatest secrecy to the castle of Pignerol, about the year 1679. During the journey he wore a black mask, and orders were given to kill him if he made himself known, or removed the mask. In 1686 he was carried by St. Mars, the governor of the castle of Pignerol, to the Isle of Sainte Marguerite; and, on the passage, the same precautions were observed as on his first journey. St. Mars having been appointed governor of the Bastille in 1693, carried the prisoner, still masked, with him there. He remained in the Bastille till his death in 1703, treated with the utmost respect, but constantly watched, and not permitted to take off his mask, even before his physician. The mask that he wore was not an iron one, though always so designated, but was made of black velvet, strengthened with whalebone, and secured behind the head with steel springs, or, as some authorities assert, with a padlock. He was buried with the mask upon his face, and his identity remains a matter of conjecture to this day.

CIS, seventeen, medium height, dark hair and eyes, of a loving disposition, fond of home and children, would like to correspond with a young gentleman with a view to matrimony.

JULIA and ANNIE, two friends, would like to correspond with two young gentlemen. Julia is dark, good-looking, of a loving disposition. Annie is tall, fair, dark eyes, brown hair, fond of music and dancing.

CAPTAIN JACANA, twenty-two, tall, dark, good-looking, of a loving disposition, fond of home and children, would like to correspond with a young lady.

TENDER and TREE, twenty-five, dark, fond of home and children, would like to correspond with a young lady with a view to matrimony. Respondent must be tall, good-looking.

HARRY, nineteen, tall, dark, fond of children, would like to correspond with a young lady with a view to matrimony.

ALICE and AMY, two friends, would like to correspond with two seamen in the Royal Navy with a view to matrimony. Alice is eighteen, medium height, dark, grey eyes, fond of home and children. Amy is twenty-one, medium height, dark, grey eyes. Respondents must be between twenty and twenty-three, dark.

LIZZIE, twenty, medium height, fair, would like to correspond with a young man about twenty-two or twenty-three.

FREDERICK ST. L., tall, fair, good-looking, would like to correspond with a young lady.

EVA and CLARA, two friends, would like to correspond with two young men about twenty-four. Eva is twenty-three, medium height, fair, brown hair, grey eyes. Clara is twenty, brown hair and eyes. Respondents must be tall, dark, of a loving disposition.

NEXT DOOR.

SHE stood upon the porch one summer eve,
While yet the twilight lingered with the day,
Amid the roses. Did they not perceive
That she was lovelier, sweeter far than they?
Like a new orb of strange, surprising power,
Unhindered, she beamed upon my sight,
And though the darkness claimed her, from that hour
She was the star that shone throughout the night.

Though I had journeyed over land and sea,
Love had not touched me with his magic dart.
Or fancy blinded and bewildered me
Until too late to liberate my heart.
No. All untrammelled by the slightest chain,
Free and unfettered, from a foreign shore
I came triumphantly, and now would fain
Be led a captive by the maid next door.

Was it because she waited my return,
That other faces had no power to stir
My heart to passion's thrill? That I was kept
Serenely loyal unto her?
Was it for her sweet sake—oh, maid most fair!
My lips Love's rapturous eloquence forbore,
Until I knelt, a lover, at the feet
Of my own sweetheart whom I found next door?

Thus oft we wander with the heart in leath,
Frowning at fate, who leads us still afar,
While Love strives vainly to direct our course
Toward the brightly shining polar star.
And when, at eve, in sorrow we return
The homeward way, our hopes and wanderings
O'er,
We find the very treasure that we sought
Ready to meet and welcome us next door! J. P.

A. W. and A. H., two friends, would like to correspond with two young ladies with a view to matrimony. A. W. is tall, good-looking. A. H. is medium height, good-looking, dark hair and eyes.

LIZZIE, MABEL and ETHEL, three friends, would like to correspond with three young men.

SANCY HARRY, LOVING TOM and DARING DICK, three seamen in the Royal Navy, would like to correspond with three young ladies. Sancy Harry is good-looking, loving, fond of dancing. Loving Tom is of a loving disposition. Daring Dick is fair, blue eyes, fond of home and children.

CHARLES and EDWARD, two friends, would like to correspond with two young ladies. Charles is sixteen, fair, of a loving disposition. Edward is seventeen, medium height, of a loving disposition. Respondents must be sixteen or seventeen, fair, good-looking.

MABEL W. would like to correspond with a young man between twenty and twenty-five.

CARRIE, eighteen, medium height, fair, would like to correspond with a young gentleman.

VIOLET, MAY and DAISY, three friends, would like to correspond with three young gentlemen. Violet and May are short, fair, fond of home and music. Daisy is tall, dark, fond of music and singing.

CHARLES SPHINX, YOUNG OAKHAM, OLD CHIPS, and LONG BUNTING, four seamen in the Royal Navy, would like to correspond with four young ladies from eighteen to twenty. Charles Sphinx is twenty-two, medium height, dark hair, blue eyes, of a loving disposition, fond of home. Young Oakham is twenty-four, fair, light hair, blue eyes, fond of home and dancing. Old Chips is twenty-one, medium height, fair, auburn hair, blue eyes, of a loving disposition, fond of home and children. Long Bunting, twenty, tall, dark, good-looking, of a loving disposition, fond of home and music.

ANNIE and MINNIE, two friends, would like to correspond with two young gentlemen with a view to matrimony. Annie is tall, dark, of a loving disposition. Minnie is twenty-two, medium height, fair, of a loving disposition.

JULIA, LIZZIE, MAGGIE, SARAH, and LILY, five friends, would like to correspond with five young men with a view to matrimony. Julia is seventeen, tall, dark hair and eyes. Lizzie is seventeen, medium height, dark hair and eyes. Maggie is seventeen, tall, dark hair, blue eyes. Sarah is sixteen, tall, dark hair, blue eyes. Lily is sixteen, medium height, fair hair, blue eyes. Respondents must be between eighteen and twenty, dark, good-looking.

VIOLET, DAISY, ETHEL and ROSE, four friends, would like to correspond with four young gentlemen with a view to matrimony. Violet and Daisy are twenty-two, dark, good-looking, fond of home. Ethel is seventeen, fair, fond of music and dancing. Rose is eighteen, fair, fond of music and dancing.

A BACHELOR, forty-five, would like to correspond with a lady with a view to matrimony.

A. M., tall, fair, would like to correspond with a young lady.

SOUTHERN CROSS JACK and ACTION ALOFT JACK, two seamen in the Royal Navy, would like to correspond with two young ladies with a view to matrimony. Southern Cross Jack is twenty-four, dark. Action Aloft Jack is twenty-one, fair, fond of home and music.

MISTLETOE, medium height, fair, brown hair and eyes, would like to correspond with a young lady. Respondent must be good-looking, of a loving disposition, fond of home and music.

HOGARTH, good-looking, blue eyes, fond of home, would like to correspond with a young lady about twenty.

COMMUNICATIONS RECEIVED:

VIGILANT is responded to by—Annie, twenty, medium height, good-looking, of a loving disposition.

FANNIE by—Tom, thirty, tall, fair, good-looking, fond of home and music.

FANNIE by—Poor Mr. Gold.

NELLIE by—Black Cockatoo, twenty-seven, tall, fond of singing and dancing.

NELLIE by—James, twenty-one, medium height, blue eyes, of a loving disposition.

E. B. by—Wynnie, twenty-two, tall, dark, good-looking.

LAMPLIGHTER by—J. G. W. A., twenty-one, medium height, fair, good-looking, of a loving disposition, fond of music.

LAMPLIGHTER by—Aggie, medium height, brown hair, blue eyes, of a loving disposition, fond of home and children.

LAMPLIGHTER by—Lizett.

LAMPLIGHTER by—A Lonely One, twenty-one, fair, blue eyes, fond of home and children.

B. J. by—Loving Little Maude, seventeen, brown hair, of a loving disposition, fond of home.

W. R. M. by—A. L.

ROSE by—Samuel C.

ANNIE by—William, nineteen, tall, fond of home.

ANNIE by—Dinaholoth, twenty-three, medium height, good-looking, fond of dancing.

MIFAN by—T. F., twenty-three, dark, fond of music.

W. A. W. by—Jennie, nineteen, fair, hazel eyes, fond of music and dancing.

A. W. by—Annie, eighteen, tall, good-looking, fond of music and dancing.

JIMMY BURGESS by—Annie G., twenty, medium height, dark hair and eyes.

RUBY by—F. P. C., thirty, tall, fair, good-looking, fond of home.

TANBY by—Maud L., nineteen, tall, dark hair, hazel eyes, fond of home and children.

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